POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM

BY LEO EDWARDS

Jack Stapleton

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POPPY OTT AND
THE TITTERING TOTEM

Christmas 1931.

Jack Staples.

POPPY AND RORY WERE SQUINTING AT THE BIG TOTEM POLE.

Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 220)

POPPY OTT

AND THE TITTERING TOTEM

BY

LEO EDWARDS

AUTHOR OF
THE POPPY OTT BOOKS
THE JERRY TODD BOOKS
THE ANDY BLAKE BOOKS

ILLUSTRATED BY
BERT SALG

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Having woven into this story the name and chief characteristics of "the boy from Milwaukee," what could be more fitting than that we should herewith dedicate the complete book to the real

ARTHUR DAVIDSON, JR.

OUR CHATTER BOX

WHEN I was a boy (and this is Leo Edwards speaking) some enterprising publisher well informed on the juvenile activities and preferences of those days got out a yearly story book called The Chatter Box.

I don't know why the Chatter Box idea expired. Certainly those big thick books with full-page wood cut illustrations and varied contents were extremely fascinating to me. And on Christmas morning the first thing I looked for was my annual Chatter Box.

Particularly do I recall one Chatter Box in which was featured a serial called The Young Moose Hunters by that justly popular writer, C. A. Stephens. I can still see the hairy wild man as he was pictured fleeing for his life across the moonlit ice closely pursued by the story's young heroes.

The "installments" of this fascinating serial were interspersed with short stories, poems, puzzles, riddles and jokes. And it was because of the varied contents of the yearly books, I imagine, that they were given the name Chatter Box.

In our own Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott books it has become a custom to greet the young readers with a characteristic preface, summarizing the various books of each series, and also broadcasting the latest news of our Freckled Goldfish lodge. In a recent preface I branched out considerably, and still there are things I want to do in this department that I can't do under the old title.

So hereafter in our Ott and Todd books, by way of a preface, we will adopt the Chatter Box idea. I'm sure it's going to be a success, for it's to be your duty, my young readers, to supply much of the material, or at least the "inspiration."

STORY WRITING

A NUMBER of boys ambitious to shape careers for themselves in journalism and its various branches, and trusting in my friendship and willingness to offer advice, have written to me to find out how I got started in this work. So I think it will be proper here to say a few words about story writing.

In the first place story writing isn't a gift though undoubtedly

many of us are better equipped to do the work than others. I've frequently made the assertion, based on my own experiences, that what a story writer needs above all else is the "urge." In other words you must have a great longing to do it. If you have the "urge" naturally you'll keep trying. And in time, granting that you have average intelligence, you'll attain some measure of success.

But boys in particular should get the notion out of their heads that writers are born. You may be another Milton. And if you are nothing that I can say here, ordinary plugger that I am myself, will interfere with or aid you. I'm thinking now of the hundreds of average boys, to help whom I am writing this article.

If you are interested in writing go ahead and write. Get all the practice you can. Work hard in your English classes. Read good books. Study the plots in these books. Get a position on your school paper; and if you have no school paper start one. If possible do reporting for your local newspaper. That eliminates the boys in the big cities. But out here in Cambridge where we drink water out of a pump—and there are thousands of similar towns scattered all over the country—any boy can get his stuff into print if it's news. And this is training.

Successful writing is largely the result of intensive living. So that is why I urge boys to be patient. You can't hope to write accepted stuff and get real money for it until you have lived. For stories really are pictures of life. The most pleasing book characters are the ones who seem most real.

So study people. Be a mixer and a good listener. Don't sit like a dreamer and wait for inspiration to flutter out of the clouds and mark you as its special pet. Get out in the streets, in the play lots, in the country and find your inspiration in the lives of your boy pals and their adults.

Boys I notice are prone to write about imaginary things. Trips to the moon and the like. That may be good stuff to develop the imagination. But it'll never open the door of successful story writing to you.

I see a group of boys. They are having a high old time. But what provokes this hilarity? Is Bill recounting an exciting trip to the moon? Oh, no. He's telling how Pete sat down on a hornet in general science class; or how Jack got locked out on the fire escape.

Aspiring writers all too often look to the "distant hills" for

romance. Successful writers find romance in the lives of their associates.

So again I say, study people. Notice their interesting characteristics. Get good marks in your English and Latin, for words are to be your tools. Do lots of practice writing. And then, when you have lived, you may be able to get your stories into print.

Bear in mind, too, that stories are but a very small part of the big business of writing. Thousands of men and women are working on newspapers and in advertising agencies. This is writing. Every letter that a business house turns out is writing. And these are your smaller opportunities that open the way, through continued training, to bigger ones.

POEMS

HERE is a poem that a boy sent me unsolicited. It isn't a high standard of poetry. But it's the best that Charles Hockett of Worthington, Ohio, could do. And so I'm including it in our initial Chatter Box.

I'd like to see some better poems than this, about our books or the characters contained therein. And I think shorter poems would be better, even getting down to a couple of verses.

So if you have something to submit send it in. Maybe I can use it and maybe not. But if I do consider it of sufficient interest to include in the Chatter Box your reward will be an autographed copy of that particular Ott or Todd book.

Here is Charles' poem:

THE GANG

My name is Jerry Todd,
I live in Illinois,
I have a lot of fun
For I play with the boys.

Scoop Ellery and Red Meyers
Are two of my good friends,
Peg Shaw is the other one.
Why? Well, it all depends.

Oh, Peg Shaw is a mammoth guy
That we feed tough beefsteak.
And he has grown so awful big
He nearly fills the lake.

Red Meyers is a little runt
With freckles on his face,
And also he has red hair that
With the freckles run a race.

I am second to the boss—
Scoop Ellery is he.
My pa works in a big brickyard
And he has fun with me.

And before I quit this tale
I'll tell you 'bout another.
Oh, she is awful nice to me—
Well, that one is my mother.

And Cap'n Tinkertop should be
Mentioned here and now.
He sits around and plays checkers
With Caleb Obed and how.

Old Cap'n Tinkertop now runs
A little parrot store,
It faces on the street called
School,
And there our gang does soar.

And Red Meyers' aunt now runs
A beauty parlor there,
And Red has to wash the panes,
But he *don't* wash them with
care.

SUMMER VISITORS

BOYS touring through Wisconsin with their elders very often drop in on me as good pals and brother Goldfish should. And I'm always tickled pink to see them. I wish I had kept a list of the many boys who came to see me last summer. But I have no such list.

I remember John Dickson, though. John's dad is connected with the Chicago board of trade and it was from there that Mr. Dickson called up one Saturday morning asking if he might bring John to Cambridge to meet me.

Now, wasn't that bully? I sure did enjoy my visit with John. Nor have I forgotten his younger sister Jane. For it was reported to me that she is as well versed in Jerry Todd lore as young John himself.

Next summer I'm going to keep a complete list of my out-of-town boy callers and this list will be used in future Chatter Boxes. Remember the address, Cambridge, Wisconsin, on Route 12 between Fort Atkinson and Madison.

Almost daily callers at our Hi-Lee Cottage last summer were John and Bill Marx, cousins of the "boy from Milwaukee," as featured in this book. Nor should I overlook Bertil Andrean, a good little scout, Myron and Gordon Monsen, George May, Bill Haight, John and Bob Beale, Jack and Jean Downs, Bill Blimke, Barton Bosworth, Eddie McCarthy, Chappy Tellefson and his cousin Teddy Jim, Bill Diener and a host of others not forgetting Bob Billings, Joe Simonsen, Bud Wilber and my various Cambridge pals.

JERRY TODD

IS Jerry Todd a real boy? Hundreds of young readers have asked me that question. And I must confess that I know of no real boy by that name.

But I do know any number of boys having Jerry's characteristics. For he's just a common little every-day square-shooter when you come to think about it,

loyal to his pals and his parents alike, always cheerfully willing to do a good turn and scornful of anything dishonorable.

That's the kind of a boy you are. At least that's the kind of a boy you should be. You don't have to solve mysteries to be like Jerry Todd. Oh, no. His "detective" adventures are interesting. But what you love best about Jerry is the boy himself. And the same is true of Poppy.

Red Meyers, Peg Shaw and Scoop Ellery are real boys. Poppy Ott is a real boy, too; my own nephew in fact. Alfred Moore (as featured in JERRY TODD, PIRATE) is a character taken from life. And if you were to hear the real story of Al's brutal treatment at the hands of the farmer who took him to raise I dare say the tears would fill your eyes.

Before he was ten years old he was lashed with a whip until his little legs bled. So aren't we glad that he now has a good home with Mrs. Dexter.

I have used many real adult characters in my books, which bears out the point that I made in a preceding article. To write successfully and sympathetically you must know people.

Is Tutter a real town? That is another question that I'm frequently called upon to answer. Yes, Tutter is a very real town. I was raised there. So I know all about the canal, the quarries, the caves in the surrounding hills, the river, Happy Hollow and so on. I might add, too, that the principal of the Tutter public school called on me last summer in company with a fine manly boy by the name of George Sims.

Tutter, however, is a fictitious name the same as Ashton and Steam Corners. Many are the rides that I've had on the old clay scow that Jerry and his gang motorized. The Jerry Todd plots, of course, are made up. And to facilitate these plots I've had to make some geographical changes in the old town.

And how did I start writing about Jerry Todd? Still another common question. As I say, Scoop, Red and Peg are real boys. They were members of my "gang" when I lived in Ohio a few years ago. Wanting to write a story about them I imagined that I, as the narrator, was one of them. And I called myself Jerry Todd.

So Jerry, in a way, is what I would be if I could go back to knee pants. And certainly Jerry's dad is Leo Edwards himself, if that is of any interest to you.

Here are the titles of the Jerry Todd books published to date:

JERRY TODD AND THE WHISPERING MUMMY
JERRY TODD AND THE ROSE-COLORED CAT
JERRY TODD AND THE OAK ISLAND TREASURE
JERRY TODD AND THE WALTZING HEN
JERRY TODD AND THE TALKING FROG
JERRY TODD AND THE PURRING EGG
JERRY TODD IN THE WHISPERING CAVE
JERRY TODD, PIRATE
JERRY TODD AND THE BOB-TAILED ELEPHANT

TOTEM POLES

RED Meyers has started something. I'm eager myself to make a totem pole. And I'm going to tackle the job next summer. I suspect, too, that many of my young readers will be whittling totem poles big and small. Be sure and let me know if you do. And let me know, too, if you name a boat of yours "The Tittering Totem," as I'm going to do with one of my boats.

LETTERS

AS I've mentioned before, I receive hundreds of letters from boys. Here's one that I thought was pretty good:

"I don't care if the picture of you that I'm requesting was taken fifty years ago," writes Heiny Marshall of Oakland, California, Freckled Goldfish No. 911. "And I don't care how you look. I'll like you just the same, even if you're an old tramp or an English dude."

My *dear* Heiny! I want you to know that I do *not* look like a tramp—except occasionally. Neither do I look like an English dude—or did you mean duke? As a matter of fact, if I may admit it (modestly), I think I'm quite good-looking. No one ever told me so; but still I've clung to that belief. I'm a little bald, and how, but what of that? In addition I have beautiful glasses—the big "owl" kind. They make me appear very learned. So naturally if I have pictures taken for wide distribution (and I have none now) I'll wear my glasses. But fifty years old! Tut, tut, tut! The angels hadn't even drawn a diagram of me at that dim and distant date, Heiny, to say nothing of screwing me together for immediate delivery.

"I must admit I'm an awful giggler," writes John Siercks, Jr., of Plainfield, New Jersey. "I can laugh all day when I read about Jerry Todd. And when he played pirate I could almost smell the rotten eggs that he

threw at the Strickers. I played pirate after that with my own gang and never before have had such fun. We didn't throw rotten eggs, though. We even had our dog rigged up in a pirate costume. He sure looked funny."

And a girl (I've misplaced her name) writes, telling how her younger brother, inspired by POPPY OTT'S PEDIGREED PICKLES, made some similar pickles of his own, to the result, as I understand it, that the family doctor had to be called in.

Naturally I can't answer all of the letters that I receive. Nor do the boys who write expect that. They're more anxious for me to devote my writing time to stories so that they'll have more Jerry Todds and Poppy Otts to read.

But come on with the letters, fellows, even if I can't answer them. Certainly I read and enjoy every one of them. Then, too, I'm going to need a lot of good letters later on. But, of course, to be acceptable for publication in our Chatter Box the letters must be interesting. I appreciate the common expression from boys, telling me how much they enjoy my books. But that isn't "news." Dressing up a dog in pirate clothes is news.

By the way, two Chicago boys, Harold Berg and Gilbert Youngberg, summering at Lake Ripley, resurrected a huge rowboat, the biggest rowboat I ever saw, and fitted it up with a big slingshot patterned after the one in the "Pirate" book. Two fine lads. And Boy Scouts, too.

ANDY BLAKE

ANDY BLAKE is a young man of a business turn of mind, favoring advertising and selling, so naturally these stories are intended for older boys. Adults, too, will like the "Andy Blake" books, the titles of which are as follows:

ANDY BLAKE
ANDY BLAKE'S COMET COASTER
ANDY BLAKE'S SECRET SERVICE

SCHOOL

I WAS the first boy in our room to get your last book, POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH," writes Richard (Red) Musselman of San Francisco, California. "Since I gave a book report on it last Tuesday about ten different boys in my grade have copies of the book."

Well, Red, that's bully—like the beef sandwich, huh? I like to see new boys drawn into the Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott circle. For I feel that they'll profit by it.

Certainly it adds to their hours of reading fun.

All of the Ott and Todd books, I might say here, are written to read aloud. Did you know that? Some books are hard to follow when read aloud. So have your teacher try out one of our books. It will be fun for the whole room.

Tell the teacher, too, when you turn the book over to her, that you and Leo Edwards are pals and fellow Goldfish, for it's true that I'm a pal of every boy in the country who is interested in Jerry and Poppy.

LEO EDWARDS

I'M not particularly eager to talk about myself here. But boys ask me all kinds of personal questions. So here's a little information along that line that may aid you in case you have to make out a report on my books.

I was born a poor boy. So poor were we, in fact, that I had to give up school when I was thirteen and go to work. At that time my mother and I—the only two at home—moved from Illinois to Beloit, Wisconsin, where I found work in a factory. Marrying when I was twenty-five, I subscribed, shortly after that, to a correspondence course in advertising and got into that kind of work, first in Beloit and later in Detroit. From the latter place I went to Ohio where for four years I was the advertising manager of a manufacturing concern.

During my years in the factory I had tried to write stories, but failed. My advertising work taught me how to write. And in Ohio I found interesting people to write about.

I love boys. My stories, I think, reflect the affection that I have for them. I'm with boys in my spare moments a great deal more than I am with men. And yet, until I met Red, Scoop and Peg in Ohio, it never had occurred to me to write a "boy" story. When I tried it, in my thirty-fifth year, I found an open door. Confident of success in this preferred field I gave up my advertising work, came back to Wisconsin, and for several years have given all of my working time to the production of stories and books for boys.

Many of my early books were serialized in The American Boy, The Target, The Classmate and The Pioneer. These publications have used my short stories, too.

As I sit writing this in my country studio, overlooking beautiful Lake Ripley, in the fall of 1928, my only child Eugene, better known as Beany, is sixteen years old and a junior in high.

He, too, wants to be a writer. So we'll wait and see what he does. Certainly he's getting a far better start than his dad.

My hobby is boys, as I say. Then, too, I'm very fond of outboard motor-boating as you probably will suspect when you read this book. It takes me about ten weeks to plan and complete such a book.

As a boy in school I liked to write what we called "compositions," but now called "themes." Leaving school I continued to write, as I say. So you see I had the "urge." But I had to live to make a success of the work just as you and Beany must do the same.

Having left school so early in life it was a hard grind. Yet I did my best. And I'm going to keep on doing my best. When I finish a book I like to feel that it will bring countless hours of joy into the lives of my scattered boy pals. So I try hard to pack into my books all the fun I possibly can.

I am told that these books are easy to read. I'm sure they are very hard to write. Some of the skylarking passages that you skim through so easily takes me hours to create to my satisfaction. First I get the idea down on paper. Then I twist it this way and that to make it sound truly boyish.

FRECKLED GOLDFISH

IS that name familiar to you? It is to a great many boys scattered throughout the country from Texas to Alaska. For our membership list continues to grow.

Boys living near here who read the manuscript of POPPY OTT AND THE FRECKLED GOLDFISH before that book was published asked me eagerly if I cared if they got up a real secret lodge like Poppy's, as featured in the book's seventh chapter.

That gave me an idea. Why not go my enthusiastic young friends one better, I thought, and get up a widely extended secret "fun" lodge open to all Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fans everywhere?

So we started the lodge, telling boys about it in the preface of the "Freckled Goldfish" book. And as I have mentioned before the response was wonderful. Letters simply poured in. And now our membership list runs into the thousands.

If you are not a member of our secret lodge I would like to leave the thought with you that we're anxious for you to join. The sole purpose of the lodge is to provide added fun for boys. So every Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott fan ought to join.

If you are too busy to write ask Mother or Dad to write for you. Or maybe Mother will write and surprise you with your membership card. We have a big registration book here in which are recorded the names and addresses of all members. I think you will be proud to have your name in this book, one of my choicest possessions.

Then, too, as mentioned, each new member receives a unique numbered membership card designed by Bert Salg, the popular illustrator of these books. Containing a comical picture of Poppy's "Freckled Goldfish," together with our secret rules (all printed on the card), each card also bears my own personal autograph, if that is of any importance to you.

Any boy anywhere, of any age, size or color, who has a friendly feeling toward Jerry and Poppy is welcome to join. It will cost you four cents in stamps—four one-cent stamps, or two two-cent stamps. One red stamp will pay the postage on your membership card; and the other red stamp will partly cover the cost of the envelope and the illustrated card.

In applying for membership please observe these simple rules:

(1) Print or write your name plainly.
(2) Supply your complete address.
(3) Give your age.
(4) Enclose two two-cent United States postage stamps—or four one-cent stamps.
(5) Address your letter to,

LEO EDWARDS,
Cambridge,
Wisconsin.

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POPPY OTT AND THE TITTERING TOTEM

CHAPTER I

RED'S TOTEM POLE

Poppy Ott was at it again. Having finally located him in his pa's big wood shed under the crooked crab-apple tree I could hear him fiddling around with some kind of a noisy jigger. Sounded like machinery to me. But when I beat a merry little rat-a-tat-tat on the closed door, expecting, of course, as his bosom pal, to be warmly welcomed into the secret laboratory or whatever you want to call it, I was told kind of impatient-like to go around on the front porch and play roly-poly with the cat.

That wasn't like old Poppy at all. Usually when a secret ambition takes hold of him he tells me all about it. For he and I are thicker than molasses in January. That is, we were thicker than molasses in January before this new notion struck him. But now, if I must tell you the truth, I was kind of peeved at him.

Still, as the saying is, I burned with curiosity to know what was going on behind the locked door

of that mysterious old wood shed. For even though my love for Poppy had turned to vinegar, untrue friend that he was, I had to admit to myself that he was no ordinary kid. Tutter's Pedigreed Pickle factory, one of the town's chief industries, is evidence of that. For Poppy, it is to be remembered by those who have read the book, *Poppy Ott's Pedigreed Pickles,* is the one who invented these famous pickles. Seven-League Stilts is another one of his successful and creditable inventions. He isn't *quite* as clever as Tom Swift. But he's young yet!

Well, having been told to shower my festive talents on the neighborhood mouse catcher, I very properly turned up my shapely nose at the locked wood-shed door and sashayed down the sun-baked street to 1014 West Main where the famous Red Meyers, B. S. A. (meaning Boy Scouts of America), was hard at work in the back yard. No, he wasn't pushing the family grass chewer as a daily good turn. Nor was he massaging the hen-house windows. His activities, I might say, to put it in a big way, were unique. He and Rory Ringer, the new English kid in our block, were carving (or trying to carve) a totem pole.

I'm a Boy Scout myself. But I take it sensibly. I don't let it run away with me like Red. Gee. Will I ever forget the day he and Rory broiled

the steak. It was one of their second-class tests. Our Scoutmaster, who was required to eat a piece of the junk in order to pass on the test favorably or otherwise, was sick for a week. Red tells around that it was rheumatism of the ribs. But I have my own ideas. For I saw the steak. Dropped into the fire four times, Red wound up by giving it a bath in the canal. Ants or something, he said. When offered the scraps, Rory's dog very sensibly parked its tail between its hind legs and lit out for home sweet home. Some dogs *are* smart. Red, though, survived the steak as chipper as you please. Like a goat, that kid can eat anything.

All wrapped up in scouting, as I say, naturally the only place in the house good enough for his cherished merit badges and stuffed rattlesnake skin is in the parlor. Mrs. Meyers doesn't like it at all. For the snake skin, she says, has a mean habit of falling under the parlor chairs. *She* knows that it's a stuffed skin. But the sight of it is an awful shock to her callers. The week Red and Rory camped on Goose Island, in the Vermillion River, the hated snake skin was chucked into the attic. But it was back in its accustomed place when the campers returned to civilization. For Mrs. Meyers knew that if it wasn't put back Red would blat for a month. She sure is good to him. I've got a tin photograph of my ma

letting me keep a stuffed rattlesnake skin in the parlor. Oh, yes. Like so much mud. I dassn't even keep a little toad in the basement.

Well, as I say, all Red knows or cares to talk about is scouting. He even wears his Boy Scout uniform to Sunday school. Once he left his Bible at home and brought a scout hatchet instead. Gosh! I asked him, as he and the hardware clattered around in the pew, why he didn't bring along his pup tent and cooking kit.

Totem poles come in different sizes. But Red, as could be expected of him under the circumstances, teemed with ambition. No measley little totem pole for him. Absolutely not. Having bought an old stubbed telephone pole for fifty cents he and Rory had lugged the pole home on their Comet Coasters and now were slashing at it with their scout hatchets as it leaned dismally against the sunny side of the hen house.

I could imagine as I looked at the mutilated pole that it was unhappily conscious of its disgrace. For what the two wood carvers were doing to it was a caution. The poor thing. Still, that's about what you'd expect of Red Meyers.

Perched on a stepladder he paused to admire his work, thinking, I guess, that I would brag on it.

"Isn't it a beauty?" he finally asked me, swabbing his sweaty face.

Should I tell him the truth? I did.

"It isn't," I acknowledged.

"Isn't what?" he glared at me.

"A beauty."

Totem poles, as I understand it, originated with the Indians. Not the redskins whose lost arrowheads are still found in our river bottoms, but certain scattered tribes or clans up in the Alaskan district. A genuine totem pole, with its carved figures one above the other, is a sort of family monument, like our marble tombstones, a raven head (called a crest) signifying that one branch of the house had married into the neighboring raven clan and an otter crest signifying that still another branch of the family had married into the otter clan. Some poles contain only two or three crests. Others have a dozen or more, for in addition to the raven and otter clans there are wolf clans, grizzly-bear clans and so on.

Red was peeved because I had told him the truth about his punk work.

"It's mighty little you know about totem poles anyway," says he spitefully.

"You and me both," says I.

"Oh, is that so," he pushed out his mug. "I studied up on it if anybody happens to ask you."

"What's that you're carving now?" says I, as he put his hatchet aside and took up a wood chisel.

"An owl," says he, chipping away artistically.

An *owl!* I wanted to laugh.

"It looks like a fish," I told him, parking my manly form in the shade of a gooseberry bush.

"Where's Poppy Ott?" the worker then inquired. "He promised to help me this morning."

"Don't say a word to me about Poppy Ott," I stiffened. "He and I aren't on speaking terms."

I was given a curious look.

"No? When did he quit?"

"Quit what?"

"Speaking to you."

"It wasn't him who quit—it was me. I'm through with him."

"Got any candy?"

"No."

"I'm hungry."

"As usual."

"Say, Jerry," the freckled face lit up, "did I tell you that I'm in line for another merit badge? Carpentry. That'll make seventeen."

"You're smart," I told him. But you can imagine how I said it.

"This is good practice," he added, hacking away with the wood chisel.

I watched him for a moment or two.

"That's a funny looking owl," I felt compelled to say.

"It was all right until Rory knocked the beak off."

"Aw! . . . Hi didn't," the junior pole carver quickly defended himself. "Hi never touched hit. Hit was you who 'it the bloomin' thing."

I like Rory, even though he does get his "h's" all mixed up. He's a good kid for his age. Yet it kind of disgusts me the way he lets Red boss him around. Red's all right. But I've learned from experience that he'll take a mile if you give him an inch.

"Anyway," the freckled one hacked away, "the beak fell off. But I can easily nail it on."

"Where did you get the idea," says I, watching him, "that totem poles were put together with nails?"

"Accidents will happen," he excused himself.

"It looks to me," I sized up his work, "as though you've had more accidents than anything else."

"It's lovely of you," says he, "to sit there and crab at us. We sure appreciate it—don't we, Rory?"

"Sock 'im with a 'atchet," was Rory's gentle suggestion.

"What animal's that?" I further pointed.

"That? Oh, that's a—a— You made it, Rory. What is it?"

"A heagle," Rory pronounced proudly, mopping his sweaty face.

"Of course," Red relayed the information to me. "It's a heagle."

"Bald," says I, returning the freckled one's grin, "or 'airy?"

"You aren't funny," Rory glared.

The leader went back to work.

"Tra-la-la-la-la-la-la-la," he sang.

"Careful," I told him. "You ought to know that you can't sing and do good work, too. The first thing you know you'll skid and dislocate the monkey's tail."

"What monkey?"

"Isn't that bow-legged thing a monkey?" I inquired innocently.

"You're the only monkey I see."

Rory was sweating worse than ever.

"Boy, this sure is 'ot work," he panted.

"We might move the pole over there in the shade of the barn," Red suggested.

"Let's."

The gentle hint was then passed to me that they needed my help. So I got up. And after considerable lugging and tugging, in which Red tripped over the stepladder and almost broke his neck, we got the totem pole propped against the side of the barn. It reached almost to the haymow door. So you have an idea how big and clumsy it was.

"Do you ever expect to finish it?" I inquired.

"Finish it?" Red repeated, staring at me. "Why, of course, we expect to finish it."

"For what purpose?"

"Can't you guess?" he countered.

"Don't tell me," says I, "that you're going to hang it up in the parlor beside your rattlesnake skin."

"Silly! We're going to present it to the Tutter Boy Scouts."

And I was one of them!

"Do the Boy Scouts have to accept it?" says I kind of guarded-like.

"They'll be glad to. For as our Scoutmaster said last week the one thing needed to finish off our camp is a totem pole."

"Yah," says I, "a *totem* pole."

Red isn't dumb.

"Well," he stiffened, "what's the matter with this one?"

"Everything is the matter with it," I told him heartlessly.

"I wish you'd go home."

"At nine o'clock in the morning? Kid," I made myself comfortable under the gooseberry bush, "I can stay here for hours."

"We will sock you with a 'atchet," young Johnny Bull put in, "if you don't dry up."

"Who ever 'eard of a 'atchet?" I mimicked him.

"Say that again," he brandished the tool, with fire in his eyes, "and see what you get."

Here a row of monkey faces came into sight over the alley fence.

"Look at Jerry Todd sittin' under a *gooseberry* bush," piped Bid Stricker, the leader of the Zulutown gang.

"Sometimes he sits and thinks," chimed in Jimmy Stricker. "And sometimes he just sits."

"Haw! haw! haw!" bellowed Red, who usually laughs at the wrong time. "That's funny."

If you have read the book, *Jerry Todd, Pirate,* you'll need no lengthy introduction to Bid Stricker and his crummy gang. Our enemy, they tried their best to steal the sunken treasure on us. At one time it looked as though they were going to be successful, too. But we won out in the end.

I don't like Bid. For he's a sneak. And Jimmy, his cousin of the same age, is just as bad. Other members of the gang, all from Zulutown, which is the name that the Tutter people have for the west end of town, are Hib and Chet Milden, brothers, and Jum Prater. It's generally agreed around town that the young Zuluites are so tough that their folks chain them to fences to keep them from biting the dogs.

Wondering what had brought the Strickers here, tough nuts that they were, I listened while they razzed Red and Rory about the totem pole.

Their lingo was funny especially when they mimicked the smaller one, calling him "the guy from the hupper hend of Hengland who made 'atchet 'andles out of bloody hoak." As for the leader, what he should do, they said, was to stick his own freckled mug on the pole. A freckled totem pole! How they did laugh. But they ducked in a jiffy, let me tell you, when Red, with blood in his eyes, started pitching rotten eggs at them from the haymow door. Gee. Eggs splattered every which way. And *stink!* Wough. I started to run. Then what do you know if the furious egg pitcher didn't paste me. He said afterwards that he mistook me for one of the flying enemy. But I know him. As a sort of unhappy climax to the exciting (and stinking) scene he lost his balance as he hung to the edge of the haymow door and fell on top of poor Rory who got three of the rotten eggs, of which Red had found a whole nestful that morning in the haymow, down the back of his neck.

The Strickers were lucky. For Red, the crazy boob, had missed them entirely. So you can imagine how they hooted at us, stinking wretches that we were, as we slunk through town on our way to the swimming hole, just off the canal, where we stripped to the skin and scrubbed our bodies with sand. We were an hour cleaning up and another hour drying our washed clothes.

About to start for home, where Red and Rory intended to resume work on the totem pole, we were attracted to the main channel by the sound of an outboard motor.

Yah, you guessed it. The thing Poppy Ott was working on so secret-like was an outboard motor. And now he was running it up and down the canal as big as cuffy.

"More fun, I suppose," says Red selfishly, "than helping *me*."

Rory had his eyes on a tow-headed kid in the front of the boat.

"Who is hit, Jerry? Do you know 'im?"

"No," says I, with a kind of jealous feeling.

And, to that point, having been shut out of Poppy's confidence, as recorded, it did hurt, let me tell you, to thus learn that he was sharing his new secret with a strange boy.

CHAPTER II

THE MAN IN THE WOOD SHED

I'LL never forget my first meeting with Poppy Ott. Of all the dirty tousle-headed kids. And *ragged!* Huckleberry Finn had nothing on him. For more than two years he and his shiftless father had trailed around the country in a rickety covered wagon daily getting poorer and poorer. *Tramps.* That's what they were, as Poppy admitted to me right out. And how he hated it.

"Pa's an old dumb-bell," he told me, when I quizzed him about the detective badge that his father flashed around. "*Him* detect? Say, he couldn't catch a crippled bedbug in a pot of molasses. No wonder the cops lock him up on suspicion. They think he's cuckoo. Sometimes I feel like knocking his block off. But Ma said I shouldn't. *She's* dead."

It's fun to read about a kid like Huckleberry Finn. You sort of envy the young adventurer his care-free life. But as Poppy told me that morning in the willow patch, after explaining to me that he got his crazy name from peddling popcorn, there's nothing in such a life for the boy

himself. Without proper schooling and a steady job no one gets anywhere.

"What I want to do," the rover confided to me, with wistful eyes, "is to settle down and be somebody. But every time I mention it to Pa he has a fit."

"Does he beat up on you?" I inquired curiously.

That brought a reckless laugh.

"*Him?* Say, he couldn't even catch me. For he's got rheumaticks."

Boys should stick together, I think. And though this one as I sat beside him was as dirty as a new potato, I saw my duty. If he wanted to locate in Tutter, I said, I'd help him get a job. Which explains briefly how our friendship began.

Advancing the price of a hair-cut I further dolled him up in one of my worn suits. For I was bright enough to realize that no sensible business man would hire a ragamuffin. Washed and dressed up he sure was a swell-looking kid. Not pretty—I don't mean that. But smart looking. My new buddy! I could tell by the way he hung around me that he liked me. And the more we were together the better I liked him.

His pa, of course, long used to coming and going as he pleased, blew up like a ton of dynamite when he learned that the wheels of his precious traveling chateau had been broken to slivers.

But Poppy made it clear to the old man that he meant business. So finally the latter pulled in his horns, agreeing to give up his silly detecting and go to work.

At my request Dad took him on in the brickyard as night watchman. But he soon fizzled out on that job. For one night a robber came. And the first thing Poppy and I knew the authorities had the dazed watchman locked up in the town jail.

I tried to tell Dad that the brickyard safe had been burglarized by the same mysterious thief who had stolen the black parrot. But he wouldn't listen to me. Nor would the authorities listen to Poppy when he took the floor in his pa's defense. So my chum and I set to work on our own hook. Picking up the vanished parrot's trail (not tail!) in a stuffy Zulutown attic we wound up in a lonely moonlit cemetery. Glazed marble eyes and sticky-fingered pine trees! Br-r-r-r! Talk about shivers. No boy, I bet, ever had a worse scare than me. For what I put my hands on in the dark! Oh, oh! Still, on the whole, it was fun. And how pleasing was our final success.

Having saved his new home, as you might say, Poppy next turned his hand to invention. Seven-League Stilts! I was to be his partner, he said, spreading out the new stilts for my admiring in-

spection, and between us we were to manufacture and market the new product in car-load lots, thus getting rich.

As though boys of our size could do that! But he wasn't to be stopped. And right then is when I really began to admire him as well as love him. For I saw how smart he was. A born business man if ever there was one. We had lots of grief. But, as I say, Poppy hung on. *Him* admit defeat? Not in a million years if he was convinced that he was headed in the right direction. So in the end, thanks to his capable and persistent leadership, we won out.

To-day Mr. Ott, a changed man, is the bustling general manager of the stilt factory that my chum and I started in the abandoned carriage plant. And if you think that you can slip anything over on the old gentleman, once so silly and dumb acting, just stop in some day when you're traveling through La Salle County and try it. *Shrewd?* Say, there isn't a penny goes to waste in that factory. He even feeds the sawdust to woodpeckers so that he can use their eggs for knot-hole plugs. And the bent nails are made into fancy pimple pickers. That's efficiency, he says. Considering how shiftless he used to be, the change in him is remarkable.

Well, having turned the new stilt business over to Mr. Ott, with high hopes, Poppy and I

set out on a "hitch-hike," as a sort of vacation. One hot night, finding ourselves stranded on a closed country road, we applied for supper and a bed at a lonely farmhouse. Here we bumped into a talkative little old lady who entertained us while we ate with a rambling account of her wealthy relative's weird death. Later Poppy and I slept in the dead millionaire's bed. Imagine that! And did I ever yip when that goofy spotted gander, the mainspring of the mystery, nipped my bare toes in the middle of the night.

The mystery solved, queer smells, striking clocks, ghostly footfalls and all, not forgetting the vanished heiress whom Poppy impersonated so cleverly, we decided, after our crazy trip across the "desert" in the "Galloping Snail," that the best place to spend a vacation was in Tutter. So back we came. And then, scarcely had we washed the sand of travel from our ears before we got mixed up in that hilarious "Pedigreed Pickle" deal.

A "Pickle Parlor!" I ridiculed Poppy's new scheme. Deep in my heart, though, I knew he could do it. And he did—with my help. There's a river pirate in this book, old Peg-leg Weir they called him. And strange hidden treasure. For, of course, pirates and hidden treasure always go together. Yes, and there's a smart kid in the story whom you'll want to push in the face. He

tried in every way he could to wreck our growing business. But what we did to him in the end. Oh, baby!

Then to vary his activities the world's foremost stilt inventor, hitch-hiker and pickle packer developed what you might call a consuming interest in freckled goldfish. It was like him, of course, kind-hearted lad that he is, to want to help old Mrs. Warmley. Having no ready money with which to pay her roofing bill he promptly took over her big collection of goldfish which were later sold at a dollar a throw. Our good friend, Sam Lung the laundryman, generously offered us the use of his store. Later he turned against us. Queer, we thought. While we were flipping goldfish over the counter and merrily initiating Dad's business friends into our new secret lodge (and you can belong to this lodge, too, if you want to as explained in the preface of this book), Red Meyers and Professor Pip, in rubber boots, were parading up and down the Weir marsh in search of a "tree with a cow's head." This unusual tree, the freckle specialist said, in his teetering way, marked the yellow-mud deposit so necessary to him in his concluding experiments. Yes, there is a strange connection between the completed freckle cure and the freckled goldfish from which the book gets its

title. Gosh, if you don't laugh your head off when you read this story I miss my guess.

And now, after all of our fun together and after all of our promises to stick together for life, Poppy had turned me down. No longer was I to be his preferred side-kick, Seven-League-Stilting with him one week and Pedigreed-Pickling with him the next. Henceforth I was to be an outsider; a sort of onlooker. I'd hear about him through other Tutter boys; and I'd see his name in the local newspaper along with the ads for stray cats; but no longer were his victories to be my victories. For he had a new pal.

Tow-headed kids always did look dumb to me. And this one, I gritted my teeth, as the motor boat disappeared around a bend in the narrow canal, had best watch his "p's" and "q's" if he wanted to save his beezer from permanent disfigurement.

Red let out a yip.

"Why, I know that kid."

"Who is he?" says I grimly, figuring that any information on the subject would be useful to the monument engraver later on.

"It's that rich kid from Walkers Lake."

"Not young Fuzzy," says I.

"No. The Davidson kid. His pa makes motor cycles in Milwaukee."

"His pa better start making harps," says I, in continued grimness.

But that was too deep for Red. As for Rory, having sat down on a bee he was too busy massaging the seat of his pants to notice what I had said.

"Hi thought hit was a bee," says he, feeling of himself. "But maybe hit was a bloomin' 'ornet."

A *'ornet!*

"Oh, dry up," I told him. "You make me sick."

Red looked at me.

"Say," says he, on the other's side, "what's the matter with you anyway? You're grouchier than a fish with a flat tire."

"'Ornet," I spit out, "and *'atchet* and *heagle."*

"Well, what of it? You say funny things yourself."

"Maybe I do when I look at you."

Rory, in the interests of international peace, wanted us to know that there was hopes for him.

"Even my father couldn't say 'heagle' when 'e first came to this country. But now 'e can say 'heagle' just as plain as anybody."

"Take him away," I screeched, "before I pull another Boston tea party."

It sounds silly, of course. But that's exactly how I felt. *Me* play with the cat. And that tow-

headed squirt from Milwaukee had taken my place. Gr-r-r-r!

"We licked you at Bunker Hill," I danced around the bewildered British forces. "And we can do it again."

Red quickly drew the smaller one away.

"Run for your life, Rory. He's crazier than a bedbug."

Left alone, I waited on the canal bank until the motor boat came back. Boy, were they ever tearing along. I waved my hand. But much less than stopping to pick me up they didn't even look at me.

I guess, though, Poppy didn't want to look at me. He had a new pal—one with motor boats and motor cycles. Well, I shoved up my nose sort of independent-like, he could keep his old motor boats and motor cycles. My rowboat and bicycle were good enough for me. One thing, I knew how to be true to my friends. I didn't let money turn my head.

In telling about Mr. Arthur Davidson's recent purchase of a summer home at Walkers Lake, three miles south of town, the Tutter *Daily Globe* had expressed the hope that the grounds of Gnome Towers, so long neglected, would be restored to their original beauty. The wealthy new owner, the newspaper mentioned, was well able to do this. Dad remembers the man who built

the big stone house with its many beautiful towers and turrets. Following his tragic death the place was closed to the public. And for many years no attempt was made to keep up the grounds. Mr. Peter Gnome, I've been told, was a very queer man. He talked to the trees and flowers. Birds and squirrels came when he called them. Even the fish answered his call. At least, such is the story that the servants told. And strangest of all he never slept in a bed. When night came he went into the woods where he made a bed of leaves sometimes in one place and sometimes in another. Rain meant nothing to him. Failing to return one morning, after a wild storm, the searching party found him, miles from home, with a battered chest. During the night a colt had stepped on him leaving the print of its hoofs.

Would Poppy go over to Gnome Towers and live? I wondered, as I started back to town. Well, if he did it would serve him right if old Gnome's ghost grabbed him by the seat of the pants and shook the tar out of him. As for the young tow-head, if *he* got stepped on by a colt I knew one kid in Tutter who wouldn't send him calla lilies.

Still, my curiosity persisted, it *was* queer that he and Poppy should lock themselves in the wood shed. What was their idea anyway? Were they keeping something there? I decided that it was

my duty to go right over to Elm Street and find out.

It was my good luck that they had forgotten to lock the wood-shed door. Yet, when I pushed on the door I got the surprise of my life. For there in front of Poppy's work-bench, sort of fiddling around as though he was searching for something, was an Indian.

Yes, sir, a real, honest-to-goodness, full-grown Indian. Our eyes met. And never will I forget the startled hunted look in his, burning gimlets that they were. Then, giving me a shove with his big open palm, he sprang through the doorway like a cat, disappearing an instant later over the alley fence.

CHAPTER III

THE CORBIN CARBURETOR

In shoving me backwards to clear the track for his hasty flight the Indian had upset me into a water cask. And there I stuck. For it was a small cask made from a halved sauerkraut barrel, kept there mainly as a cooling tub for Poppy's hot blacksmithing irons.

Wet from my heels to my top ribs—and it was nasty smelling water, too, a miserable cat having earlier drowned in the tub—I struggled to free myself. But my strength at the moment wasn't what it should be.

Those eyes! Boy, it isn't to be wondered at that my strength had petered out on me. Not that I'm soft. But I had bumped into the spy so sudden-like and so unexpected that it kind of took the starch out of me.

That blamed tub! Still squirming to free myself, and mad enough now over my predicament to chew tenpenny nails, I sort of pricked up my ears in increasing apprehension when I caught the sound of nearing voices.

Then I struggled harder than ever to free myself. For one of the voices was familiar to me. *Good*-night nurse! The last fellow I wanted to meet just then was that stuck-up Poppy Ott.

"You wheel the motor around to the workshop," instructed the returned mechanic, thus sealing my doom, "and I'll stop in the kitchen and get a hacksaw."

By screwing my head sideways I could see the tow-headed Milwaukee kid as he wabbled into sight around the corner of the house pushing a loaded wheelbarrow. Soon he was within a few feet of me. And did his onion-like eyes ever bulge out when he caught sight of me?

I didn't say anything. I just let him stare at me. Then, plainly puzzled, he dropped the wheelbarrow handles and walked clean around me sizing me up from all sides. And still I didn't say anything.

"Hi," says he finally, having come to the conclusion, I guess, that I was alive.

But I just looked at him frigidly.

Here Poppy's mug appeared in the kitchen door.

"I can't find it, Art. Are you sure you didn't take it home?"

"Never mind the hacksaw," yipped the Milwaukee kid. "Come here, quick. There's a

deaf-and-dumb guy laying an egg in your blacksmithing tub."

Which smart crack, of course, brought Poppy on the run.

"Why," says he, staring, "it's Jerry Todd." Then he broke into a grin. "What's the matter?" he inquired genially. "Did your setter get overheated?"

More smart truck.

"I'm surprised," says I, elevating my chin, "that you'd even speak to me."

"And why not?" he regarded me curiously.

"Don't tell me," says I, in continued frigid dignity, "that you've forgotten about the cat."

"The one that drowned in the tub?"

"No. The one that you told me about this morning when I rapped on the wood-shed door."

"Oh! . . ." his grin broadened. Then, noticing that the door was open he gave a startled cry.

"Did you spring the lock, Jerry?"

I hadn't noticed that.

"Is it sprung?" I let out my neck. Sure enough. So the Indian *was* a spy just as I had suspected.

"You must know something about it," Poppy persisted.

"Sure thing," put in the Milwaukee kid. "And if you don't tell us we'll choke it out of you."

Imagine him talking that way to me, the ugly little brat.

"It's a good thing for you," I glared at him, "that I'm wedged in this tub."

"Aw! . . ." he showed spunk. "Who's afraid of you?"

"One push, kid," I gave him a close-up of my arm muscles, "and that clever little Adam's apple of yours would pop through a crack in the back of your neck."

"Talk's cheap," he swaggered, apparently unafraid of me.

Poppy then helped me out of the tub. And was I ever a bedrabbled spectacle.

"Now," says young funny-face, standing up in front of me like a fighting cock, "if you want to try pushing my Adam's apple through the back of my neck just go ahead and push."

But Poppy, to save the smaller one's life, quickly stepped between us.

"Jerry," says he, referring to the broken lock, "if you know anything about this I wish you'd tell me."

Should I? He hardly deserved any help from me. Still, I wanted to do what was right.

"Poppy," I finally came to a decision, as I squeezed the stinking water out of my soggy pants, "did you know that there's an Indian on your trail?"

"Sitting Bull, I suppose," says he, thinking that I was talking nonsense.

"No. A real Indian. I came over here, after you passed me in the canal—"

"What's that?" he interrupted, searching my face.

"Yes, you did," I waggled. "I waved to you but you never even looked at me."

"Where was that?"

"Up the canal near the swimming hole."

"Then you saw us?"

"I just said I waved to you."

"Anybody with you?" came the added quick inquiry.

"Red and Rory."

"Young Fuzzer wasn't along?"

"Him?" I turned up my nose, realizing now that the occupants of the speed boat had passed without seeing me. "I should hope not."

"Fine! And how did it sound?"

"What?"

"The motor."

"Not so good."

"It's the carburetor," he waggled. "But I'm still convinced that I can fix it."

So it was a carburetor that they were working on! Still, I couldn't see why they had to be so blamed secretive about it. Having shared other secrets with Poppy, I felt that I had proved myself trustworthy.

"I wanted to tell you about the carburetor, Jerry," he seemingly read my thoughts. "But Art, who owns the motor, asked me to keep shut until after the race. I wasn't to tell anybody, he said, least of all young Fuzzer. Which reminds me that you two fellows haven't been officially introduced to each other. So shove out your mitt, Jerry, and quit glaring at him. For he's a good kid. As for you, Art Davidson, I want you to know that you're now shaking the hand of a real guy. Jerry Todd is the best pal I've ever had or ever hope to have."

Gee-miny crickets! I hadn't expected that. Still, I should have known that Poppy wouldn't turn down an old friend. Not for all the money and motor cycles in the world. As for telling me to fool around with the cat, did I have such an important opinion of myself that I couldn't take a joke? It would seem so. And what a swell little kid this Davidson boy was with his shiny round face, like a cheese, and laughing blue eyes. He had pretty hair, too. Just like ripe corn silk. No wonder Poppy, meeting him at Walkers Lake, had taken a fancy to him.

Now that things were all right again I sure felt happy. Yet, those soggy pants were an awful mess. And the *smell*. Wough. Almost as bad as the rotten eggs.

"What you better do," advised Poppy, holding his nose, "is to hang your pants in the summer breeze and slide into a pair of mine."

Which was a corking good suggestion, I agreed, further helping myself to a suit of his P. D. Q.'s and one of his shirts. Lots of times he and I wear each other's clothes. For we're exactly the same size, even to the length of our feet.

While I was dressing in Poppy's bedroom he and the other kid checked up on their stuff. But nothing was missing. Either the spy had been scared away empty-handed or had failed to find what he was searching for.

"And you're dead sure, Jerry," Poppy pressed, plainly puzzled, "that it wasn't young Fuzzer dressed up like an Indian?"

"No," I shook my head. "It was a man. And did he ever have a mean look. Br-r-r-r! Like a two-edged carving knife."

"But how came you to get wedged in the tub?"

"He shoved me backwards."

"And then beat it, huh?" the other grinned.

I nodded.

"Jerry," then came the more serious inquiry, "do you know old Patsy Corbin?"

"Sure thing. Everybody in Tutter knows him, and likes him, too."

"Did you ever hear that he's an inventor?"

"No."

"Well, he is. You should see the useless truck in his house. Can openers, mop wringers, coffee percolators and a hundred other things. His latest invention is a power washing machine, driven by a small air-cooled gas engine. And the engine's *carburetor*. Oh, baby! Old Patsy has struck on an entirely new principle in carburetion."

"Whatever that is," I cheerfully exposed my ignorance.

"A carburetor," the explanation was then dished out to me by old brain-bag, "is a mechanical device, necessary with all gasoline engines, which mixes the gas and air in correct proportions."

"Exactly," says I, looking wise.

"A lot of automatic carburetors have been invented—carburetors that are supposed to give a perfect mixture at all engine speeds. But do they? I'll tell the world they don't, especially on outboard motors. How old Patsy with so little experience in that field ever came to pick up his idea is a mystery to me. But, as I say, it's a real idea. Original, too. I'm going to help him patent it. And do I ever hope that it makes him rich. For you know how poor he is right now. But first we've got to apply the idea and thus prove its superiority over other two-cycle carburetors."

"Poppy," says I, weakened by this flow of mechanical intelligence, "do you really know what you're talking about?"

"Why, of course," he grinned, in that friendly way of his.

"What?" says I shortly.

"Carburetors."

"But what connection is there," I tried to pick my way into the daylight, "between a carburetor and a bicycle?"

"I didn't say anything about a bicycle."

"He said *two-cycle,*" put in the Milwaukee kid, who had been taking in the junk with every appearance of understanding it.

"Well, what's that?—a tandem?"

Poppy laughed.

"Gas engines," he explained patiently, "are of two fundamental types—four-cycle, like automobile motors, and two-cycle, like outboard motors."

"I thought they were all alike," says I.

"No," he shook his head. "An automobile motor explodes every other revolution of the crankshaft. And a two-cycle outboard motor explodes every revolution."

"Anyway," says I, giving up, "it's too complicated for me. Suppose you tell me, instead, why you brought up young Fuzzer's name. Is he trying to snitch the carburetor on you?"

"It's to be hoped," says Poppy quickly, "that he knows nothing about the carburetor."

"Then may I ask why did you suspect him of breaking into your workshop?" I followed up. "And why did you ask me if he saw you up the canal?"

"He's spying on us, Jerry."

"But why?" I persisted.

"Because he knows that we're doing something to Art's motor. And he's afraid that we'll speed it up and thus clean up on him in the coming race."

"Are you going to race with him?" I then turned to the Milwaukee kid.

"Nothing else but," came the prompt reply. "And do I ever hope to beat him. For you know how he acts with that speed boat of his. He thinks he owns the lake."

Yes, I happened to know a lot about young Fuzzer and his fast motor boat. And do the fishermen at Walkers Lake ever hate him. For he runs rings around them. Poppy and I got a dose of it one day. And when we put a dent in his gas tank with our slingshots he threatened to have us arrested. His father stuck up for him, too. Can you imagine that? But, to that point, Clarence Fuzzer is merely a small edition of his old man. Which really is funnier than it sounds to you. For Lawyer Fuzzer, to let you

in on the "weighty" secret, tips the scales at almost three hundred pounds.

Art told me then how he and young Fuzzer had clashed on the lake, each daring the other to a fifteen-mile race to thus settle the dispute of whose boat was the fastest. Fuzzer felt secure in the proposed race. For the "Tweet! Tweet!" never had been beaten—though if you can think of a sillier name than that for a speed boat I'd like to have you dish it out.

With carburetors on the brain, Poppy, of course, was tickled pink over this chance to try out the Corbin carburetor on a racing motor. So far, though, his tests had been unsuccessful. However, he still had big hopes. For as I have mentioned he's no quitter. Obstacles and discouragements simply draw heavier on his stock of ambition and enthusiasm.

But more than winning the race, as pleasing to him naturally as to the rest of us, he was thinking in the event of success of what the wide distribution of the new carburetor would mean to the destitute old inventor. For once the carburetor was advertised every outboard racing fan in the country would want one. More than that, according to our big dreams, it wasn't improbable that the outboard motor people would agree to install Corbin carburetors on all of their models, paying the inventor a fat royalty.

So now you know all about the Corbin carburetor. If Poppy could make it work on the outboard motor Art would win the coming race, probably the most important thing in his mind. The inventor, too, would reap a fortune in his old age.

CHAPTER IV

PEACEFUL HOENODDLE

MOTHER told me things that noon that sent me to the telephone in a jiffy.

"Poppy," says I, when my chum unhooked the receiver at the other end of the line, "I've got some bad news for you."

"Shoot," says he, prepared.

"Mother heard this morning that they're going to sell old Patsy's stuff and take him away to the poorhouse."

"Who do you mean by 'they?' " came quickly.

"The town board, I suppose."

"We'll look into that. . . . Come over as soon as you can, Jerry."

I was there before the clock struck one.

"It's Lawyer Fuzzer's work," says Poppy, when I joined him in the kitchen where he was massaging the dinner dishes. "I found out from the mayor."

There was a lot of bla-bla-bla stuff in the Tutter *Daily Globe* when the Fuzzer family came to town. Kingsley Fuzzer, the newspaper stated, for many years a resident of Chicago, was ac-

knowledged to be one of the most astute lawyers in the state. His legal practice had made him rich. And now, wanting to take life easy, he had moved to the country.

Having sort of looked him over on the installment plan, a yard or two at a time, I almost laughed my head off when the newspaper stated further that the newcomer, by way of recreation, was going to take up horseback riding and golf. The golf part was all right. But imagine *him* astride a horse, two-legged lard vat that he was. The poor horse, huh?

Don't get the idea though, from my lingo, that I had it in for him because he was fat. As a matter of fact I like fat people, lawyers included. And I always respected him until that day at Walkers Lake where he has a summer home. But I have no respect for him now. For how could I respect any man who talked to us the way he did?

Still, the Tutter business men think he's the whole works. He's smart, they say. And they give him the lead in almost everything. So there was nothing surprising in the fact that he had charge of old Patsy's affairs.

"I wish I was rich," says I, helping Poppy with the dishes.

"So do I," says he, reading my thoughts.

"It'll break old Patsy's heart to go to the poor-

house," I added, putting a neat little polish on the gravy bowel with my wiping cloth. "For he's proud, in a way."

"What puzzles me," says Poppy sort of thoughtful-like, as he sloshed the dishes around in the pan, "is why Fuzzer is so blamed anxious to put the old man in the poorhouse. For he's the one who suggested it to the mayor."

"Patsy owes him money," says I, remembering what Mother told me.

"Yes, I know. And a debt's a debt, of course. In a way we shouldn't criticise Lawyer Fuzzer. Still, I'd hate to have it on my conscience that I'd broken an old man's heart just to collect a debt. And that's what'll happen, as you say, if Fuzzer's scheme goes through."

"Can't we raffle off something, Poppy," I felt the need of action, "and raise the necessary money?"

"That wouldn't save old Patsy from going to the poorhouse. For even if we were to pay off his debts he hasn't anything to live on."

"Dad'll give him a job," says I confidently.

"Yes, or my dad either, for that matter. But the chances are he'd go back to his inventions after a day or two. It's the mayor's story that he told the old man a year ago that he'd either have to get a steady job or go to the poorhouse.

Yet here he is, not only penniless and a burden on the town, but in debt."

"Poppy," says I grimly, unwilling to desert an old friend in his hour of trouble, "there's one thing we can do."

"Meaning which?" the other regarded me curiously.

"We can abduct him. You say yourself that there's a fortune in the new carburetor. So if he's going to be rich in a few months why let the town disgrace him now by locking him up in the poorhouse? As I tell you, he'll never be the same if they do lock him up. Why," I waxed sort of dramatic, "he might even die, like the poodle dog that bit Red Meyers. I think it is our duty to abduct him," I wound up eloquently.

"Jerry," the other looked at me warmly, as he soaped the dishrag, "you're a great kid. I like you better every day."

"I didn't think so this morning," says I sheepishly.

"No?"

"I thought Art had cut me out."

"The more you see of that kid, Jerry," Poppy seemed pleased to speak of his new friend, "the better you'll like him. Nothing stuck-up about *him*. Yet like young Fuzzer, who's just the opposite, he can have everything he wants."

"If that's the case," came the natural inquiry, "why doesn't his pa buy him a faster motor?"

"There's a big difference in motors, Jerry. Even the makers can't explain it. But of two motors, identical in construction, one frequently is the fastest. And it so happens that young Fuzzer was lucky enough to get one of the fast ones. He knows it, too. And you couldn't buy his motor for double what it cost him."

"Yet you think that the new carburetor will give Art's motor the desired speed?"

"It should. I'm going to make a new manifold this afternoon. A sort of goose-neck contrivance. And to-morrow, I think, will tell the tale."

"I sure hope Art wins."

"As I told you this morning, Jerry, young Fuzzer's hep to the fact that I'm tinkering Art's motor to speed it up. So I wasn't half crazy in suspecting him of breaking into the wood shed. For he'd gym the motor in a holy second if he got the chance."

He was that kind of a kid, all right.

"The next time you see him hanging around," I laughed, thinking of the morning's battle, "send for Red Meyers."

"Yes," Poppy laughed in turn, when I had made myself clear, "it would serve him right to sock him with a rotten egg. Still, to beat him in

a fair race will humiliate him a million times worse."

The peculiar spy then came in for further discussion.

"But if he was dressed like any other man," Poppy checked up on me, "how did you know that he was an Indian?"

"By his copper-colored face and black hair."

"And you say he tried to murder you with his eyes?"

"Nothing else but."

Putting a quick finish on the dish-washing job the young housekeeper wiped his hands and slid into his coat.

"Come on, Jerry," says he, starting off.

"Where to?" I took after him.

"Old Patsy's house. Maybe he knows something about this mysterious Indian."

Poor as he is, and all alone in the world, you'd naturally expect old Patsy Corbin to live in Zulutown. For as I have mentioned that is the shabby part of Tutter. The houses there are small and unpainted. Gaunt, hungry-eyed dogs skulk through the dusty streets, and the back yards, for the most part, in addition to being littered with tin cans, are grown up to mustard weeds.

It was our good fortune that Bid Stricker and his gang were nowhere in sight. Otherwise we might have had a battle on our hands. For they

claim Zulutown as their own territory. And can they ever pitch bricks! Oh, baby!

Turning a corner we were stopped by a stoop-shouldered, white-haired old man who, having paused in the shade of a cottonwood tree, was now swabbing his sticky face with the dirtiest handkerchief that I ever saw in all my life.

"My name's Hoenoddle," says the old man in a kind of shrill, cracked voice. "Peaceful Hoenoddle, I'm called. An' I live at Walkers Lake. . . . Be you wantin' to buy any fish to-day?"

"No," grinned Poppy.

"Mebbe," the old man hung on, resting on his crooked cane, "your ma would like to buy some fish to-day."

"No," says Poppy a second time, shaking his head. Then he added soberly: "My ma's dead."

"Pshaw! Lost your ma, heh? Now, that's too bad. Wa-al, if she's daid she sartinly hain't a-wantin' to buy no fish. An' how about you?" he turned his watery blue eyes on me.

"Are you a fish peddler?" I inquired curiously.

"Me?" he straightened. "A fish *peddler?* Most assuredly not, young man. You don't see no fish hangin' on me, do you? Think I carry 'em in my pockets an' hooked under my coat-tail? No, sir," he thumped the sidewalk with his cane, "I'm no fish *peddler.* I'm a fish *order taker.*"

What a funny old coot he was, I thought.

"And are you always able to fill your orders?" I grinned, remembering how uncertain the fishing was in the big lake.

"Sonny," the old man further drew himself up, "you have only to name it an' Peaceful Hoenoddle will see to it that it's at your back door tomorrow mornin' all cleaned an' ready fur the skillet."

"All right," I pulled a clever one. "Put me down for a couple of whales."

"Um. . . ." the watery eyes were kind of narrowed now. And it seemed to me that they were sharper and more piercing. "A couple of whales, heh? *Whales,* you say. Ben't you the Todd b'y?" he muttered, bending closer to me.

I acknowledged the name, at the same time sidling away from him, for I didn't care to have his face stuck in mine.

"I knew your grandpop," he further cackled. "The worst fisherman, if I must say so, an' the biggest liar who ever dangled a hook an' line over the side of a boat. . . . Sure it hain't bullheads that you want?" he sort of leered at me.

The nerve of some people.

"Go talk with Dad," I told him stiff-like. "And maybe you'll find that he's as big a liar as my grandfather."

The old man laughed then. A sort of cackling,

tittering laugh. And he slapped me on the back with his free hand.

"Heh! heh! heh! Don't like to have me rattlin' the family skeleton, heh? Wa-al, Sonny, don't let yourself be fooled by a tricky ol' man who likes a joke as well as the next feller. I know you, from havin' seed you at Cap'n Tinkertop's house. But I never sot eyes on your grandpop, grantin' that you really had one. . . . Now, havin' apologized, as you might say, do I git an order fur bullheads, or don't I?"

There was something about him that irritated me.

"You couldn't sell me a bullhead with gold toenails," I told him bluntly.

"No?" he again eyed me sharply. "Wa-al," his voice changed, "I know what I am goin' to sell you."

"What?" I felt compelled to inquire.

"A boat," says he, hobbling away. Turning, he looked back. And once again I heard that disagreeable tittering cackle.

"Don't let him get your goat," Poppy laughed, noticing how I felt. "For it's generally agreed at the lake that he's half goofy."

"Then you've seen him before?" I followed the bent form with puzzled eyes.

"No. But I've heard of him. Art's dad bought a home-made rowboat from him. A swell

job, to. So as you can see, among other things, he has boats on the brain."

Far down the sun-baked street with its blanket of gray dust I could see a knot of people in Patsy's cluttered yard. And my first startled thought was that the old inventor had suddenly died. Then, like Poppy, I stiffened with anger. For Lawyer Fuzzer, quick worker that he was, having emptied the house of its complete belongings, was now perched on a box in the shade of the house where, as auctioneer, he was calling on the inventor's assembled neighbors for bids.

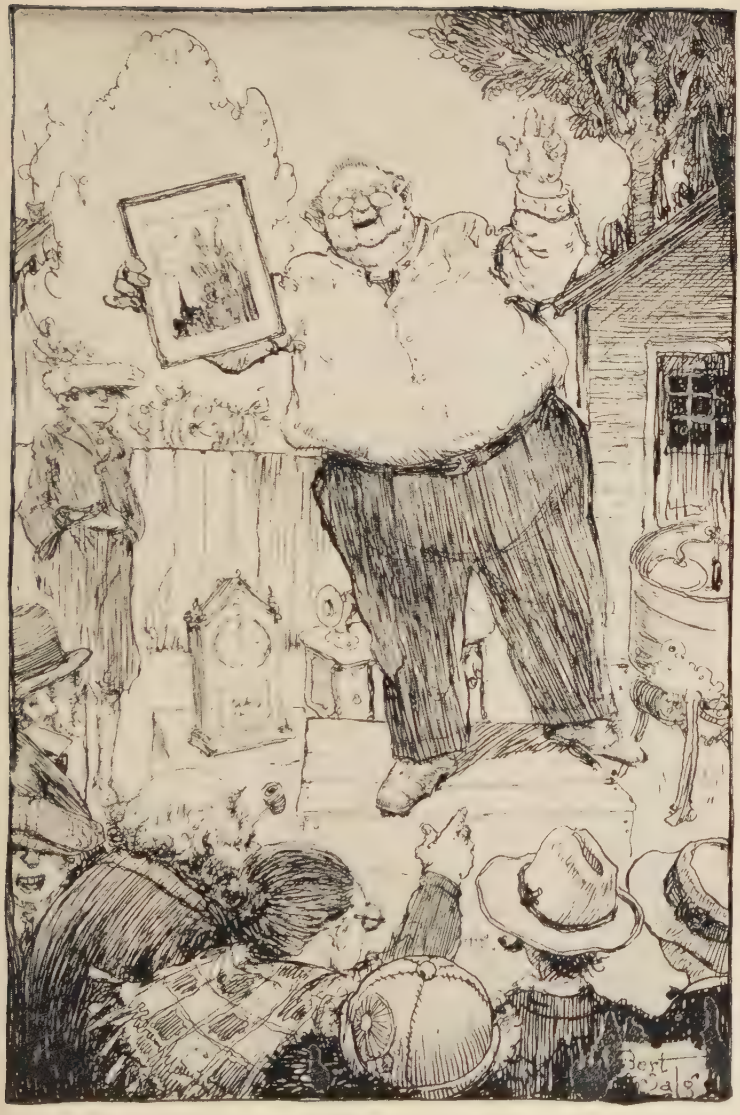
CHAPTER V

AT THE AUCTION

NOT only is Lawyer Fuzzer built hippopotamus-style around the waist line, with huge arms and hands, but he has a monstrous balloon-like face the purple jowls of which hang down like an over-fed sow's. Huge elephant ears project from the sides of his fat head. And farther up, among the ivories, he has the scant yet treasured remnants of what used to be a thriving pompadour.

A thing that helped him as auctioneer was his booming, thunder-like voice acquired, I guess, from long practice in haranguing jurymen. Even when he's carrying on a supposedly mild conversation you can hear him a block away. And now with his naked dome exposed to the summer breezes and his tent-like shirt open at the neck you could have heard him seven blocks.

Boy, was he sweating! Like a young creek. But mere sweat couldn't hold that bird back—not when there was a little jack in sight. And some people still believed that he had come to



LAWYER FUZZER BECOMES AN AUCTIONEER.

Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem. *Page* 47

Tutter to retire! An old money-grabber—that's what he was. I saw that, all right.

"And now, folks," he boomed in his characteristic pompous way as I edged into the crowd, "suppose we give a little attention to art. For therein lies the foundation of civilization. Notice this beautiful picture, folks. A genuine oil painting in a hand-carved frame. Undoubtedly a masterpiece. However, as I've had no special training in art I can't say. Who'll start it at a dollar—one lonely little dollar. Somebody bid a dollar. Look! *Look!* LOOK! Ladies, *please* look. A beautiful oil painting. Hundreds of years old and undoubtedly worth a fortune. An antique, friends. A rare antique. And yet you hesitate to start it at one lonely little dollar."

"It ain't," shrilly contradicted a neighbor woman.

"Ain't what?" grunted the puffing auctioneer, swabbing his beet-like face.

"Hundreds of years old. For me and my husband gave it to Mr. Corbin last Christmas. And all it cost us was fifty cents."

A titter ran through the crowd.

"Um . . ." further grunted the flushed auctioneer. "Madam, you shouldn't interrupt. But as no one seems to be interested in art—"

The woman then bid thirty cents.

"What's the name, please?"

"Mrs. Matilda Wiggins."

"Sold to Mrs. Matilda Wiggins for thirty cents," boomed the auctioneer, handing down the painting. "And now, folks, let us see how much interest you have in modern invention. As you know, our estimable friend and neighbor, Patrick Corbin, is an inventor of note. Here before your eyes are many practical examples of his mechanical ingenuity, any one of which, I dare say, if properly placed on the market would net millions for its promoter."

"Heh?" an old man shoved up an ear trumpet. "How much did you say?"

"Millions," the big voice boomed.

"You mean this truck is worth millions of dollars?"

"Undoubtedly, sir. All it needs is exploitation."

"Then why don't you buy it yourself? You're rich. An' they tell me that you're smart."

"But I'm no promoter, sir," old fatty could well afford to speak politely after the nice little compliment handed to him.

"Not a *voter?*" the old man got the word twisted. Then he stiffened. "Neow, listen here, you big sausage, you kain't stuff me that way. Fur if you hain't fifty years old to a day I'll eat my shirt. Fifty years old an' still you say you

hain't a voter. What's the matter?—be you one of them fureigners who's too tight to take out citizenship papers?"

"He didn't say 'voter,' Mr. Krebby," another man shouted into the ear trumpet. "He said 'promoter.'"

"Oh! . . . Promoter, heh? I thought he said 'voter.'"

"As I was saying," the booming went on, as the purple-jowled owner of the bass voice mopped up the sweat, "we are offering at public auction this afternoon not only our estimable friend's complete household effects but his many clever inventions as well. Which, of course, is all done with his consent and approval—a necessary procedure, I might add, in order to liquidate his debts. It is unfortunate that such things must happen. But business is business. And to look on the bright side our friend, let me assure you, is quite well pleased with the plan that the town board has of taking care of him in his old age."

"He ain't," Mrs. Wiggins snapped again. "He don't want to go to the poorhouse at all. And you know it, too. For I heard him tell you so."

"Madam, must I insist that you hold your tongue? You are interfering with the sale."

"This is a free country," Mrs. Wiggins' chin went up. "And I'll talk all I want to."

"I have the authority to put you into the street."

"You?" the woman cried angrily. "Put *me* into the street, you say? Well, I'd like to see you try it. If I couldn't completely scratch your eyes out, you big wind-bag, my neighbors would."

"Hurray fur Matilda," a voice cheered above the general laughter.

"I never saw the man yet," the encouraged old lady glared spitefully at the angry auctioneer, "who could talk *me* down."

"Friends," begged old fatty, sensibly holding his temper, "let's cease this absurd byplay and get down to business. Here we have one of Mr. Corbin's very clever inventions. A combination coffee grinder and can opener. What am I bid? As I tell you there may be a fortune in it. Possibly millions. Will some one start it off at ten dollars?"

"Ten cents," a familiar shrill voice spoke over my shoulder. And wheeling I almost brushed noses with old Hoehandle or whatever his name was.

"A most unique household utensil," boomed the perspiring auctioneer, ignoring the small bid. "A practical combination coffee grinder and can opener. Potential wealth, folks. All the article needs, as I say, is proper exploitation. And who'll start it off at ten dollars?"

"Ten cents," again spoke the shrill voice.

"Am I offered nine dollars? The opportunity of a lifetime, folks. Come on, speak up. Don't be backward. Faint heart never won fair lady. Nine dollars. No? Then, will some man of vision say eight-fifty?"

"Ten cents," the shrill voice again wedged itself in.

Everybody was snickering now.

"Friends," says old fatty, dropping a few more gallons of sweat, "we can't afford to give this stuff away. I'm depending on you to use your intelligence and bid accordingly. Modern invention as examplified in this clever combination coffee grinder and can opener is what keeps alive the industrial system of our marvelous country. Modern invention puts the fire under our factory boilers and turns the wheels. It is the backbone of our national wealth. And here we have as clever an article as I ever set eyes on. As I say, friends, a practical combination—"

"Ten cents," spoke the shrill voice a fourth time.

Old fatty's eyes blazed. But he was denied the satisfaction of socking the offending bidder over the bean with the clever combination coffee grinder and can opener. For he saw plainly enough on whose side the crowd was.

"Sold," he boomed, willing to sacrifice the

coffee grinder in order to get rid of the nuisance. "Sold to Mr. Peaceful Hoenoddle for ten cents. Get the money, Clarence."

Yes, little dimple-dear was there. I had noticed him up in front seated at a sort of desk. He was the clerk or whatever you call it.

"Um . . ." says the old fisherman, when the combination coffee grinder and can opener was shoved at him. "What be you givin' me that thing fur?"

"You bid it in," boomed the scowling auctioneer. "So pay your ten cents and stand aside."

"I swan!" cackled the dumb-faced old man. "I don't even know what you're talkin' about."

"Didn't you say 'ten cents?' "

"Of course I did. But I wasn't talkin' to you. I was talkin' to Mr. Krebby. He wanted to know how much my bullheads were a pound. An' I says, says I, 'Ten cents.' But he kain't hear very good. So I haid to tell him over a'gin. 'Ten cents,' says I. 'Forty cents?' says he, misunderstandin' me. 'No,' says I. *'Ten cents.'* . . . What be you doin'?" then came the innocent inquiry as the old man rubbered around. "Holdin' a sale?"

Well, say, I thought I'd split. As for old fatty, looks having failed to massacre the pottering offender he sensibly ignored him realizing, I guess,

that unless he quickly got things in hand the sale was liable to end then and there.

"Here's ten cents," says he, tossing a dime to the family nest egg. "I'll take the coffee grinder myself."

"Ten cents is an awful cheap price fur bullheads," cackled the foggy old fisherman. "Still," he waggled, "I kaitch 'em easy."

Poppy, I saw then, after following me into the crowd, had disappeared. And I noticed, too, for the first time that old Patsy was nowhere in sight. I ran into the house. But all I saw was bare walls. Nor was Poppy or the old inventor in the garden.

Returning to the front yard, puzzled by my chum's disappearance, I found that old Patsy's latest invention was being offered for sale.

"Yes, friends," boomed the auctioneer, "this is the power washer that you've heard so much about. I wish I could demonstrate it. You housewives in particular would enjoy seeing the fine work it turns out. And with so little effort, too. Grease spots disappear like magic. Handles everything from fine linens to heavy blankets. Nor need you depend on electricty. For as you can see it has a self-contained air-cooled gasoline motor. Now, here is an article that must be started at a fair price. Who'll offer me fifty dollars? You're getting more than a washing

machine, folks. You're getting a great invention. Washing-machine manufacturers are reaping millions. Everybody knows that. So here is your chance. Fifty dollars am I bid? What? Isn't there a man here who'll start this power washer at fifty dollars? It will take the wash-day drudgery out of your lives, folks. So speak up, you husbands who love your hard-working wives. Help them keep that schoolgirl complexion. Fifty dollars. Am I offered fifty dollars? Then, if not fifty dollars, make it forty-five dollars. Who'll say forty-five dollars?"

"Ten cents," old Hoehandle again came to life.

"Now, listen here, Mr. Hoenoddle," bellowed the furious auctioneer. "I've had enough of your nonsense. This is no fish market."

"Wa-al, who said it was? You asked fur bids. An' I bid ten cents."

"I bid forty-five dollars myself," boomed the auctioneer, shutting the other out. "Now, who'll raise it? Forty-five once. Forty-five twice. Forty-five the third and last time. Your last chance, folks. So if you want the washer raise the bid. Going . . . going . . ."

"Ten cents," the old fisherman piped up.

"Sold to myself for forty-five dollars," bellowed the auctioner. "And here's the money, Clarence."

"Jest hold your hosses," the shrill voice was

raised to a sharper pitch as its owner pushed his way through the laughing crowd. "How do you figger the washer's yours when I raised you ten cents?"

With the crowd against him old fatty was too wise to start an argument.

"Then you intended to raise me?"

"Exactly," the old man waggled.

"That being the case," the speaker's eyes spit poison, "I'll raise you to forty-five-fifty."

"Forty-five-sixty," came promptly from the fisherman.

"Forty-six."

"Forty-six-fifty."

"Forty-seven."

"Forty-seven-fifty."

"Fifty dollars even," boomed the auctioneer.

But that didn't stop old Hoehandle.

"Fifty-one," says he.

"Fifty-two."

"Fifty-three."

"One hundred even," boomed money-bags.

"One-fifty," says old Hoehandle.

But instead of being pleased that the bidder had raised him, old fatty glared like a cornered cat.

"Two hundred," says he.

"Two-fifty," the bid was raised.

"Three hundred."

"Three-fifty."

"*Four* hundred."

"Four-fifty."

Boy, was it ever exciting. Four hundred and fifty dollars for a washing machine. But old Fuzzer saw that he had a sucker. So he ran the bid up still higher, though the way he glared at the other bidder was a puzzle to me. Could it be, I wondered, that he wanted the washing machine himself.

"Five hundred dollars," says he.

The old fisherman deliberated.

"Don't let him bid you down, Peaceful," a man cheered.

"Five-fifty," says old Hoehandle.

Fatty's eyes bulged, proving to me that he *did* want the washing machine. And more than ever I wished that Poppy was there. For I began to suspect crooked work.

"*Six* hundred," fatty mopped his dripping face.

"Six-fifty."

"*Seven* hundred," the bid was thundered out.

"Seven-fifty."

"EIGHT HUNDRED," boomed old fatty.

There the bidding stopped, to the crowd's disappointment. And later, the wilted auctioneer having given the clerk an eight-hundred-dollar check, I saw Poppy and the old fisherman with their heads together.

"I had a hunch," the leader told me, with dancing eyes, "that old Fuzzer would bid up on the washing machine. So I told Mr. Hoenoddle to run the price up to eight hundred dollars and stop."

"I swan!" cackled the pleased old man. "*Me* bid eight hundred dollars, mind you, an' I ain't even got a ten-dollar bill. I was skeered to death one spell he'd knock the washer down to me fur seven-fifty. In which case I would 'a' bin in a pickle, heh?"

I got Poppy's ear.

"Do you suppose it's the carburetor?" I inquired excitedly.

"Either that," he nodded, reflective-like, "or the complete washer."

I began to sweat.

"But he has everything," I cried, "carburetor and all."

"Oh, no, he hasn't."

I was then shown a paper.

"It's a bill of sale," says Poppy. "While Fuzzer was auctioning off the combination coffee grinder and can opener I bought the carburetor from old Patsy for ten dollars."

"But is it legal?" I sort of held my breath.

"I hope so. Anyway we've got the carburetor. Here's the drawings, too. All Fuzzer got is a washer and an incomplete engine."

CHAPTER VI

THE IVORY POCKET PIECE

"Poppy," says I, as we left the dust and sun-drenched scenery of Zulutown behind us, "now we have got to do it."

"Do what?" says he, with a sort of thoughtful far-away look in his eyes.

"Abduct old Patsy. For Lawyer Fuzzer will soon be after him to find out where the carburetor went to. And you know how timid the old man is. Scared to death by the lawyer's bossy gab, he'll blab everything he knows. So as I tell you, to save our own hides as well as his, we've simply got to get him out of the way. And the sooner we do it the better."

"Jerry," the other's thoughtful look continued, "tell me again about that Indian. What was he doing when you first spotted him?"

"Fiddling around your work-bench."

"Searching for something, huh?"

I nodded.

"He may have stopped in out of curiosity," Poppy further turned the mystery around in his

mind. "More probably, though, he's a hired spy. Yet whose spy?"

"We know who wants the carburetor," says I.

"Of course," the other read my thoughts. "But the man you're thinking of, Jerry, doesn't even know that the carburetor's missing."

Which was true, all right. Certainly, was my conclusion, recalling the details of the sale, old fatty wouldn't have paid eight hundred dollars for a washing machine if he had known that one of its most important parts was missing.

"How about his son?" I then suggested.

"Would he be hanging around here himself, Jerry," Poppy further made use of his wits, "if he had a spy working for him?"

"All right," I accepted the leader's deductions, "we'll leave the Fuzzers out of it. And what then?"

"Big interests may be at work. For instance, some concern having use for a carburetor like Patsy's may have sent the Indian here to snitch it on us—though how the spy found out that we had it is an added mystery to me. That's one theory. Another is that the Indian is working alone."

This kind of talk put a shaky feeling in me. For I could very well imagine the abbreviated consideration that two boys would receive at the hands of a determined corporation. Still, Dad

had told me that big concerns were honest. Which practically brought me to the conclusion that the mysterious Indian was his own boss. Queer, though, my thoughts carried me along, that he should want the carburetor. An *Indian,* mind you. Could it be, I then quizzed myself in growing excitement, that the wood shed held some other peculiar secret? We hadn't thought of that.

But this theory when dished out to Poppy didn't excite him half as much as it had excited me. For as I have mentioned he had carburetors on the brain and nothing else but. So I kind of cooled off.

"And what did old Patsy have to offer?" I then inquired, hopeful that the leader had picked up some helpful information in that quarter.

"Nothing," Poppy slowly shook his head. "He thought I was cuckoo, I guess, when I kept asking him if he had spotted an Indian hanging around his house. The poor old man. Did I tell you, Jerry, that I found him huddled in the bare kitchen crying his eyes out? 'Poppy,' says he, looking at me through his tears, 'they're goin' to take me to the poorhouse.' Then he told me the whole story of how he had gotten into Lawyer Fuzzer's debt. Fuzzer it seems had heard about the half-finished washing machine. Evidently it looked good to him for he put up two hundred

dollars to finish it. Then when more money was needed he coughed up another three hundred bucks, telling Patsy that if the washer was a success he'd put it on the market and pay the inventor a royalty. Papers were signed to that effect. But old Patsy has nothing to show. And now, having been sold out, he's broken-hearted."

"Let's hope," says I kind of anxious-like, "that old Fuzzer doesn't rush him off to the poorhouse before we put on the big abducting act."

"Oh, I've taken care of that," the other laughed.

"Fine!" says I, ready to leave everything in his hands, resourceful leader that he is.

"We'll need a rope ladder, Jerry."

"How long?" says I promptly.

"About twenty feet."

"And while I'm making the ladder," says I, "what are you going to do?"

"Whittle out a new manifold for the carburetor. But that won't take long. And then we'll scout around for a flivver."

"Old Israel Solbeam offered me a peachy one the other day for five bucks," I told him, speaking the name of the local junk dealer from whom, as you may remember, we bought the old merry-go-round organ, as mentioned in my "Oak Island Treasure" book.

"Will it run?"

"Just like a Pierce-Arrow," I lied cheerfully.

"How are the tires?"

"Kind of flat on the bottom," I admitted, "but otherwise they're all right."

Poppy laughed.

"All right, Jerry. While I'm jiggling the new manifold into shape you can make the rope ladder. And then between us we'll tackle the flivver."

Ten minutes later we turned into the leader's yard where we found the tow-headed Davidson kid batting a tennis ball against the side of the house. Barefooted, he had on the same faded brown coveralls that he had worn that morning which proved, all right, as Poppy had said, that there was nothing dressy or stuck-up about him. I liked him better every minute. And to think that I had threatened to push his Adam's apple through the back of his neck! Gee! What funny things will happen.

"How's she comin'?" he inquired of the head mechanic, eager, of course, to get his motor in shape for the coming race.

But Poppy's mind wasn't on motors.

"Say, Art," he inquired quickly, "have you any hidden rooms in that old castle of yours?"

"Sure thing. And they're haunted, too."

"Haunted?" I quickly picked up the word, recalling the story of Mr. Gnome's tragic death.

"What do you mean?" I kind of let out my neck. "Ghosts with hoof prints on their chests?"

"Nothing else but," the kid grinned impishly. "Our housekeeper saw the hoof-marked ghost three times since we've been there. So we don't use that part of the house any more. Anyway, we have ten times as many rooms as we need."

Poppy's eyes were dancing.

"Where do you sleep?" he further inquired.

"In a bed," was Art's cheerful reply.

"Yes, I know. But where's the bed?"

"On the second floor over the east sun parlor."

"To-night when you turn in tie a string to your big toe and hang the string out of the window."

"What's the idea?" Art showed natural curiosity.

"We're going to need you between eleven o'clock and midnight."

"I can wait up for you."

"No. We'll rout you out when we get there."

"My poor toe," the smaller one grimaced.

"You're going to have a boarder, Art."

"You?" a pleased look flashed across the round face.

"No," Poppy was conscious of the compliment. "Old Mr. Corbin, the man who invented the new carburetor. We'll keep him in the hidden rooms. And it'll be your job at mealtime to see that he gets plenty of ham and gravy. But for heaven's

sake, Art, don't spill the beans to him that the house is haunted. For he's scared to death of ghosts."

"Anybody would be scared of a ghost with hoof prints on its chest," I put in.

I don't believe in ghosts, of course. I'm too big for that. So don't get any wrong ideas from what I just said. Boys talk that way. Certainly, I had not the slightest suspicion as we further discussed the proposed abduction that we'd actually bump into a ghost, least of all the dead millionaire's ghost. But weird things happened to us as you'll learn by reading on. Gee-miny crickets! Will I ever forget that terrible storm that overtook us in the forest that surrounded the hidden house. For we heard things that were bad for us. And Rory saw a face peering at us through the drenched bushes.

The abduction was going to be fun, all right. There was no doubt about that. And wanting to help, Art cheerfully agreed to hang the toe-string out of the window as instructed. But we weren't to yank the string too hard, he said, looking out for himself.

Outside of abducting the aged inventor and winning the coming race, Poppy's plans for exploiting the new carburetor, I might say here, were a big vague. And I wondered, as I untangled Mr. Ott's clothesline, the other two having gone

into the wood shed to begin work on the manifold, if old Fuzzer wasn't liable to yank the invention away from us after all. For even if he didn't learn of its whereabouts through old Patsy, whose abduction was scheduled for ten o'clock that night, young Fuzzer, with his knowledge of outboard motors, would recognize it at sight after which, of course, he'd quickly peddle the news to his old man.

Finishing the ladder I meandered into the workshop where the "goose-neck" manifold, as the chief mechanic called it, was quickly taking shape. Having fastened the motor to the side of a barrel the starting rope was brought into use about five bells. And did the motor ever tear. Oh, baby! I thought Art would yip his head off.

"Four thousand revs per minute," he cried, watching the tachometer, which was a sort of speed indicator fastened to the top of the balance wheel. "That's three hundred faster than it ever did before. Poppy, you're hot. And she's still climbing! *Forty-one* hundred! As steady as a clock, too."

Told then by the beaming mechanic to take the motor home and keep it under lock and key until it could be given further secret tests on the lake, Art lit out for the business section to hire a truck, for the racing boat also had to be taken home.

Poppy made things hum in the kitchen when the clock struck six. For he was supposed to have supper all ready by the time his pa got home. So we separated with the understanding that we'd meet at the junk yard at six-thirty.

Cutting across the back yard I was attracted to the alley fence by the sound of familiar voices.

"Oh, gee!" says Jum Prater. "Ain't it purty?"

"Yes," says Jimmy Stricker. "And I bet it's valuable, too."

They were rubbering at something in Bid's hand.

"Carved ivory always is valuable," another kid spoke up.

"I'll tell the world. You sure are lucky, Bid."

"I found it over there by the fence," the leader informed, pointing to the spot where the Indian had made his flying leap.

What the dickens? . . . Then as I caught sight of the object I almost fell over.

A small ivory totem pole! Could it be, I wondered, that the wood-shed Indian was a totem-poler or whatever you call it? We hadn't dreamed of any such thing as that. And how exciting!

Wheeling, I skinned back to the house to get Poppy. But when we returned to the alley the Strickers had gone.

CHAPTER VII

PREPARING FOR THE ABDUCTION

On the surface we could see no connection between the totem-pole pocket piece and the Indian's secret visit to the wood shed. But I hung on that there was a connection. And finally the leader quit arguing with me. Anyway I was entitled to the last word. For as I have mentioned so many times in my books I'm a full-fledged Juvenile Jupiter Detective.

Poppy got Hail Columbia from his pa because supper wasn't ready. And I in turn got Hail Columbia from mine for keeping supper waiting. But that was nothing to worry about. Nicely refreshed, so to speak, I lit out for the junk yard south of the canal where I found the leader draped against a four-wheeled masterpiece of the early automobile art, the relic it seems having just been untangled from the huge pile of abandoned automobiles in the back of the cluttered lot.

"An' vot you tink?" he mimicked old Solbeam. "All id cost me vas fvorty-nine sends."

"Let me tell one," says I, taking a sight-seeing tour around the dilapidated antique.

"Plus four dollars," he tacked on, with one of his characteristic ear-to-ear grins.

"Not a bad buy at that," says I, jiggling one of the mournful looking fenders.

There was an angry cry then as the dispirited fender unable to longer retain its grip on the rusted frame fell weakly into my arms.

"Of course," glared Poppy, "you would do that."

"What's the diff?" I heaved the unnecessary hunk into the weeds. "The lighter she is the faster she'll travel."

"This is a sensitive piece of machinery I'll have you know. So lay off the rough stuff."

"Has it an engine, Poppy?" I inquired.

"You ought to know. For it's the same one you looked at the other day."

"Go on," says I. "That one had a gray body."

"It got washed off last night in the rain."

"Anyway," I gave the four-wheeled wreck an encouraging pat, "I always was partial to yellow paint."

"Isn't it a beauty, Jerry?"

"Let's not brag on it too soon," I sensibly held my enthusiasm in check. "For like the old saying, 'Beauty is that beauty does.' Besides, if you praise it too much it may get stuck-up."

Plainly afraid that the old car would collapse on us before we got it into the street, the junk dealer generously gave us a lift. And then, the crime committed, he heartlessly locked the junk-yard gate, leaving us to our fate.

"Well," says I, with a sort of resigned sigh, "we've got to keep it now whether we want to or not."

"It cost four dollars and forty-nine cents," says Poppy. "So why shouldn't we keep it? Anyway," he added, in his big-hearted way, "it's a good car."

"Who turned it in?" I quizzed brightly. "Christopher Columbus?"

"Don't slander it, Jerry. Remember, you'll be old and bent some day yourself."

"Old and bent is right," I agreed. "Yet in its day, I suppose, it was the pride of the boulevard."

"It's still my pride," says Poppy gentle-like, as he kind of put his arms around it.

The big nut!

"Look out!" I yipped. "You'll tip it over."

"The poor thing," he further petted it.

"If you kiss it," I told him spitefully, pretending that I was jealous, "I hope you get a mouthful of grease."

"It has feelings, Jerry," says he softly.

"Keep it up," I danced. "And the first thing you know I'll get mad and do something."

"Ni-i-ice Lizzie."

"Lizzie, me eye. Its name is Betsy."

"*Betsy?* How do you get that way?"

"Bouncing Betsy the belle of the boulevard," I gave the old rattletrap a name.

"*My* Betsy," he further stroked it.

Which was more than I could stand.

"Whoop-ee!" I let out a roar, hard-boiled guy that I pretended to be. "Watch me kick a hole in old Betsy's oil pan."

"Stop it!" came the shriek.

"Take that, you old hussy."

"You're no gentleman," says Poppy stiffly.

"Gr-r-r-r!" I socked the old wreck again. "You will neck in public, huh? And with my sweetie, too."

"Leave her alone, I tell you."

"Oh, oh!" I danced on one foot. "I broke a bone, Poppy."

"Too bad it wasn't your head." Then, the show being over so to speak, he ordered me to get busy and pump up the tires.

"Oh, Poppy!" I let out a squeal. "We've been cheated. There aren't any brakes on the front wheels."

"You big goof!" he laughed. "Jiggle that pump, I tell you. Or I'll sock you over the head with it."

This was indeed the age of miracles as the

newspapers tell about. For Poppy be it recorded to his credit actually brought the old wreck back to life. And *smoke!* Oh, baby! As the blue clouds rolled and billowed around us, the car itself shimmying the while like a young earthquake, we completely lost sight of the town. The wonder is that some excitable citizen didn't turn in a fire alarm.

"We'll give it a shot of oatmeal as soon as we get home," yelled the chief mechanic, when I complained to him that the water leaked out of the radiator faster than I could pour it in.

"How about a dish of cornflakes?" I cheerfully bellowed in turn, as he further prodded the motor with a long-handled screwdriver.

"Climb in, Jerry," he slammed the hood down.

"Wait a minute. I forgot to dust the radiator cap."

"Kind of noisy, huh?" he listened critically.

"OH, NO!" I bellowed. "Whatever made you think that?"

Climbing into the driver's seat he heroically grabbed the full-floating steering wheel and felt around among the wabbly pedals.

"Well, here we go. Hang onto your eye teeth."

"Poppy," I screeched, as Bouncing Betsy backed up and kicked over a hitching post. "You've got the wrong lever."

"So I have," he admitted, trying again.

Giving the crippled hitching post a spiteful look, old Betsy gathered her petticoats about her and skedaddled down the bumpy street at seventy miles an hour.

As can be imagined we attracted a lot of amazed attention. But that was all right. However, as we were doing our touring on a ten-year-old license plate, it was just as well we sensibly decided to keep away from the business section. Later, if the car survived, we'd treat it to a nice new license. But we were all set for tonight.

Coming within sight of Poppy's house where Mr. Ott sat on the front porch in his stocking feet, his eyes glued to the pages of the evening newspaper, old Betsy, as though to show off, socked her hind teeth into the bit and beelined it for the front door.

"Howdy," says Poppy, wiping the smoke and surplus grease from his eyes.

"Um . . ." scowled the startled parent. "Whar in Sam Hill did you git that blasted thing?"

"We bought it from Mr. Solbeam," says Poppy proudly.

"*Bought* it? Humph. He should 'a' paid you money fur luggin' it off."

Having bought a curry comb at the Zulutown

auction old Mr. Hoehandle, in passing, stopped in to show us his purchase.

"Got it fur ten cents," he bragged, in his silly cackling way.

A swell chance I saw to have some more fun.

"Lift that hind foot, Betsy," says I, putting the curry comb to work. "Got a water blister between your toes, huh?" I scraped the spokes of the right hind wheel. "Well, we'll have to get you some bunion salve. Steady, now. Steady, old girl." Then I went around to the other hind wheel.

"I swan!" gulped the pop-eyed old fisherman. "What be you thinkin' that is anyway? A hoss?"

"Burs, burs, burs," says I, further addressing my gab to the supposed "hoss." "Of course, you would mess up your pretty tail that way." And for several seconds I combed patiently and painstakingly. Then I sort of broke into song:

The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be,
She ain't what she used to be,
She ain't what she used to be;
The old gray mare, she ain't what she used to be,
Twenty long years ago.

Which was too much for old Hoehandle.

"I guess I'll sot," says he kind of weak-like.

Mr. Ott was laughing. And then, while Poppy and I dosed the leaky radiator with oatmeal

which, by the way, checked the leaks to a mere dribble, fragments of conversation came to us from the porch, mostly about fishing and boating.

"Which reminds me," old Hoehandle tackled us, "that you b'ys better come over to my house to-morrow mornin' an' take a look at my new boat."

He was bound it seems, crazy nut that he was, to sell us a boat.

"Are you building another new boat?" Poppy inquired politely.

"Sonny, buildin' boats is what I do *all* the time. Turned my hand this trip to one of a dif'rent kind. Jest finished it, varnish an' all, yesterday afternoon. An' if it don't scoot I'll eat my shirt. . . . Got the Davidson b'y's motor fixed yet?"

And did Poppy ever stare.

"Didn't think I knowed about the motor, heh?" cackled the old man. "Wa-al," the same crafty look came into the watery blue eyes that I had noticed in Zulutown, "I know a lot of things, I do. Mebbe like the other people around here you b'ys think it was a hoss what did it. But *I* know. It was no hoss I want to tell you that made them hoof prints. Not by a jugful. As fur that Fuzzer b'y, drat his ornery hide, impertinent young smart aleck that he is, even cuttin' my lines on me—yes, he did; I kaitched him at

it—if you kin beat him in the race that you're plannin' you're sartinly welcome to the use of my new boat. Anyway," the old man started off, "stop in to-morrow, the two of you, an' take a look at it."

Following him with our eyes, neither Poppy nor I said a word until the pottering form with its thumping cane had disappeared around a street corner. Then the leader recovered his gab.

"Well, I'll be cow-kicked! What doesn't that old cod know?"

"Poppy," I cried excitedly, "there's something queer about him. I thought so this afternoon, And now I know so. For you heard what he said. Sure, is he, that it wasn't a 'hoss' that killed the millionaire? How does he know? And if he does know why hasn't he told the police instead of keeping the secret to himself all these years? Bu-lieve me," I wound up, ready for business, "goofy or not goofy, I'm going to keep an eye on that old bird."

Poppy gave me a peculiar smile.

"To-morrow," says he, figuring, I guess, that I'd be tickled pink to sort of sleuth the queer-acting old man in his own lair, "we'll stop in and take a look at his new boat. A scooter, hull? Well, if he's built a faster boat than Art's we sure will consider it."

CHAPTER VIII

CLEVER LITTLE ME!

WANTING to save old Betsy's strength for the coming abduction we hoofed it down town at eight o'clock instead of riding, Mr. Ott having promised to stay at home and watch our flivver until we got back.

The five Zulutown bums were loafing near the police station. And did I ever puff up my chest when the marshal, an old friend of Dad's and a sort of coworker of mine, yelled to me to come inside.

"Have you boys heerd about old Patsy Corbin?" Bill Hadley inquired, in that deep, gruff voice of his.

"Meaning which?" says I guardedly.

"He's disappeared."

For a brief instant I felt sick, thinking, of course, that Lawyer Fuzzer had gotten in ahead of us. Then it slowly percolated into my bean that Poppy wasn't playing croquet with my shins for nothing.

"Prob'ly you know," Bill went on, "that Patsy's

household goods an' other truck was auctioned off this afternoon. Lawyer Fuzzer I hear bid in the washin' machine fur eight hundred dollars. Think of that! But when the auctioneer went into the house to settle up, preliminary to escortin' Patsy over to the poorhouse, the ol' gent had completely disappeared. Fuzzer dropped in here to git my help thinkin', I guess, that I'd start right out with a posse an' scour the country. As though I keered a whang-doodle whar the ol' man disappeared to jest so he shifts his worthless freight into some new locality. Fuzzer, though, was terribly het up over the ol' man's flight. So if you spot the runaway you better let me know."

Which explained why he had called us in.

"Did you say," Poppy spoke up, "that Lawyer Fuzzer bought the washing machine?"

"Yep."

"Engine and all?"

"Of course," growled Bill, acting as though he considered the latter question kind of unnecessary. Nor did he say any more about the invention. So we knew, all right, that the loss of the carburetor hadn't been reported to him.

Bid Stricker had his ugly mug stuck in the screen door, sore, of course, that I had a stand-in with the marshal and he didn't. But I didn't douse him with a cup of water. For it suddenly

occurred to me that I'd have to get on the good side of him if I ever expected to feast my eyes on the miniature totem pole.

"Hi, Bid," says I, just as sweet as pie. "Come on in."

But he hadn't read the poem of the spider and the fly for nothing.

"Go lay an egg," he scowled.

"Say, Bid," I went over to the door, "I bet you can't tell me where my hands are."

"Clever, aren't you?" he sneered.

"Well, can you?" I persisted.

"Do you think I'm blind?"

"I'm willing to bet you."

"To bet me that I can't tell you where your hands are?"

I nodded.

"Why, I can see where your hands are," he kind of scoffed.

"Listen here, Bid," says I, getting down to business. "I'll bet you everything that I've got in these pockets against everything in yours that you can't tell me where my hands are."

"Yah!" he jeered. "With the marshal on your side you would like to have me shell out my truck and then grab it on me."

I went over to Bill's flat-topped desk and unloaded my pockets.

"Seventy cents," says I, "and a two-dollar

knife and three marbles and a lollipop. Now, come in and unload your truck."

"Of course," says he, in that continued sneering way of his, "I look simple."

He did, all right. But it wasn't good policy for me to agree with him.

"This is a fair and square bet," I told him. "And much less than favoring me as you think, Mr. Hadley will turn the stuff over to you if you win."

"The seventy cents and everything?"

"Including the lollipop," I nodded.

"And all I need to do," he pinned me down, "is to tell you where your hands are?"

"That's the ticket," I nodded again.

"It sounds fishy."

"You can trust Mr. Hadley," says I, "even if you feel you can't trust me."

"Absolutely," waggled the marshal who, I guess, was wondering what kind of a brainless stunt I was trying to pull off.

"Go ahead, Bid," encouraged Jimmy Stricker, thinking of the seventy cents.

"But it's fishy, I tell you," the leader held back. "For anybody can see where his hands are."

"I'll even give you three guesses," I held out the added bait to him.

"How about me?" says Jimmy eagerly.

"No," I shook my head. Of course, I didn't know that the ivory totem pole was in Bid's pocket. But it was more likely to be there, I reasoned, than in Jimmy's pocket. For Bid isn't the kind of a kid to give anything away if he can possibly make use of it himself.

Finally he came inside, though first he looked over the door to make sure that a bucket of water wasn't liable to come tumbling down on top of him.

"All right," says I. "Shell out."

"Remember what you promised me," he turned to Bill.

"Um. . . . Mebbe I better git the straight of things before you kids go any further. As I understand it Jerry has his hands in his—"

"Don't tell him," I yipped.

Bill grinned all over his homely face.

"I swan! Purty near let the cat out of the bag that trip, hey? Well, anyway," he further spoke to Bid, "you're to guess whar Jerry's hands are. If you guess kee-rect the truck that Jerry put up is your'n. But if you don't guess kee-rect the truck that you're goin' to put up is his'n."

"And he's to have three guesses," I tacked on generously.

Bid in the meantime had unloaded his pockets. And did my little heart ever thump with joy when

the ivory pocket piece came into sight. Poppy started forward but stopped at my signal.

"A piece of ivory," I checked up on Bid's truck, "and two cents and a rubber band. Is that all?"

"See for yourself," he turned his pockets inside-out.

"All right," says I .

"Ready?" he inquired eagerly, thinking of how much candy seventy cents would buy.

"Shoot," I told him, shoving my hands out of sight.

And did he ever yip out his first guess.

"Your hands are in your pockets."

"No," I shook my head.

He almost fell over.

"I mean," he sort of steadied his wabbly knees, "that your hands are in your pants pockets."

"No," I shook my head again.

He was pop-eyed now.

"They are, too," he cried, in defense of his second guess. "I can see 'em."

"One more guess," says I coolly.

He got down then and took a closer look, asking me to turn each pocket inside-out, which I did, thus proving to him that the pants had real pockets and not just slits in the sides. He made sure, too, that there were no holes in the pockets

big enough for me to shove my hands through.

"All right," says I, when my hands were out of sight.

"Wiggle 'em," says he.

Which I did.

"If you say your hands aren't in your pants pockets," says he, as his temper got ready to pop off, "you're a liar."

"And that's your third guess?" I began to sing inside.

"Yes," he shot back at me, "and my first one, too."

"Then you lose," I told him, reaching for his junk. "For these are Poppy's pants. And I had my hands in *his* pockets. My own pants are hanging on his back porch."

"It's a skin game," screeched Bid, grabbing for the ivory pocket piece. But I was too quick for him.

Bill looked kind of dizzy.

"I swan!" says he. Then he kind of collected himself. "Be them your pants, Poppy?" he inquired grimly.

"Yes, sir."

"Gimme that totem pole," Bid flew at me. "Gimme it I say, or I'll kill you."

"Tut, tut," scowled Bill. "Boys who go 'round killin' folks usually end up on the gallows. So jest lay off the 'killin' ' stuff. Jerry pulled a clever

one on you, all right. An' so fur as I kin see, takin' Poppy's word fur it that them is his pants, you're the loser. Fur if the pants is Poppy's naturally the pockets that are a part of the pants are his'n, too."

Told then to clear out, the whole caboodle of us, Poppy and I scooted for home lickety-cut, soon out-distancing the furious enemy, for it was time now to begin the big adventure.

CHAPTER IX

HOW BID PAID US BACK

SEEKING separate tree trunks in Poppy's front yard he and I, panting from our hard run, waited in the dark for the Strickers to come along. But the enemy apparently had given up the chase several blocks away. For nothing more was seen of them.

Thirsty, we went around the house to the pump, noticing as we passed the lighted bay window that Mr. Ott now had his nose buried in a thick leather-backed book. And did water ever taste so good to us as then. Oh, baby! I could feel it trickle clean to my toes. Then nicely refreshed we weaved into the kitchen like a couple of loaded water jugs where we switched on the lights thus getting our first close-up of the miniature totem pole.

And was it ever a darby little thing. At the top was an odd-looking old man wearing a stovepipe hat. Strangely, as I studied the half-closed eyes, he gave me the feeling that he was hiding queer secrets. Sort of like the Egyptian Sphinx, I guess. Arms folded on his stomach he sat on

the head of a bear. Below that was a head with a long beak not unlike a parrot's and still farther down the head of a whale. In all, including old high-hat, the pole contained eleven delicately carved figures, one above the other, the very lowest of which appeared to be a devil with his tongue hanging out. The birds and animals, of course, were crests. We had the right dope on that. But how about the old man in the high hat? Why was he put there? Was he the tribe wizard? Had the pole been carved in his honor? Or was it just a clever piece of knife work?

Like me Poppy was sort of connecting the totem-pole jigger with the pole's daggery-eyed owner, granting that it was the Indian who had dropped the peculiar pocket piece.

"I'm beginning to think, Jerry, that these totem-pole Indians are a queer lot."

There was a stir in the parlor.

"That you, Poppy?" a voice inquired sharply.

"Yes, Pa."

"Don't you go snoopin' in the ice box now, you young scalawag, an' drink the cream off the milk like you did last night. Fur coffee hain't coffee to me unless it's got thick cream in it. An' all I haid this mornin', as you very well know, you two-legged cat, was thin milk."

"Say, Pa," Poppy went into the front room, "do you know anything about Alaskan Indians?"

The old man stared, the thick book dropping into his lap.

"I swan!" says he. "Why don't you ask me if I know anything about Chinese woodpeckers? No, I don't know nothin' about Alaskan Injuns. In fact I didn't know they was any Injuns up thar. I thought it was all Klondike gold diggers an' Eskymooes."

"They make totem poles," says Poppy.

"Oh! . . . *Them* kind. Yes, I've read about them. Tlingits is their name."

In the talk that followed one thing led up to another. And soon the trustworthy old man knew as much about the Corbin carburetor as we did.

"Um . . ." says he, looking at us with pleased eyes. "When's this big abduction comin' off?"

"To-night," says Poppy.

"But how kin you abduct the old gentleman if he's already skint out?"

"I told him to hide in the attic," Poppy then explained the mysterious "disappearance."

The look of admiration deepened in the elder's eyes.

"An' whar be you goin' to take him?"

"Over to Art Davidson's house."

It turned out then that Mr. Ott knew more about Gnome Towers and the general weird history of the castle-like place than either of us.

For having struck up an intimate acquaintance with Bill Hadley he had joined the marshal in a trip through the rambling house, where the story of the millionaire's strange mode of living and his later tragic death had been told to him in detail.

Sleeping in the open both winter and summer, exposed by changing seasons to driving rains and biting blizzards, the eccentric millionaire, who could call the birds and squirrels to him, had been found stiff and cold, many miles from home, his hoof-marked chest telling the tale of his fearful end.

Fascinated by the weird story Poppy forgot all about the wood-shed Indian and his probable Alaskan ancestors.

"What would the law do in a case of that kind?" he inquired of his father. "Hold the owner of the colt responsible?"

"That's the queer part as I get it from Bill. No trace of the colt ever was found."

"Then how do they know that it was a colt?" I put in.

"As a matter of fact," Mr. Ott spoke slowly, kind of wagging his shaggy head, "they don't know. But what else could it 'a' bin?"

Not infrequently at moments such as this my mind works like wildfire.

"The millionaire may have been in hourly fear

of his life," was the exciting theory that I dished out. "He was afraid to sleep in a bed, which explains why he hid nights in the woods first in one place and then in another. And he made companions of the birds and squirrels so that they would warn him if the *thing* that he feared tried to creep up on him while he was asleep."

"Um . . ." Mr. Ott studied me with his sharp eyes, now so much like Poppy's in their expression. "An' what kind of a *thing* be you thinkin' of?" he inquired quietly.

"Maybe a man," says I, as a peculiar picture of old Hoehandle flashed through my mind, "dressed up in hoof-like shoes."

And still the probing eyes studied mine.

"Did you ever mention this to Mr. Hadley?"

"No, sir."

"Kind of fanciful. Still, it's somethin'." Then he inquired shortly: "Suspect anybody in partic'lar?"

I did, of course. But as I told him I didn't like to mention any names until I had proof.

"Wa-al, if it's Lawyer Fuzzer," he made the natural mistake in jumping to conclusions, "I sure hope you land him in the cooler. Never did take to him no-how. Too foxy-eyed to suit me. So I hain't surprised none by what you b'ys have jest told me. . . . Had you thought of tellin' your story to the Chamber of Commerce?"

I let Poppy answer that.

"It's better to wait I think," says he wisely, "until Fuzzer shows his hand. For we have no real proof against him."

"The low-down scoundrel! I'd like nothin' better than to give him a good swift kick in the seat of the pants. An' that's what he will git, by cracky, if he comes belly-achin' around me fur the carburetor."

"Don't overlook the point," grinned Poppy, "that you can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar."

The meaning of which was perfectly clear to the elder.

"Wa-al," the old man smiled, figuring, I guess, that it would be fun to pump the fat lawyer, "I'll do my best. An' I don't mind tellin' you," he added, "that I'm proud of you both. You're good b'ys, you be. An' I'm glad you're standin' by ol' Patsy in his hour of need. If you need any extra money, Poppy, jest go down to the bank an' tell Mr. Lorring that you have permission to draw on my personal account. Or if it's tar an' feathers that you want," came more grimly, "jest drop in at the factory. Thar's three feather cushions in my office. An' out in our storeroom is a barrel of tar waitin' to be spread on the roof but which might jest as well be put to some other useful purpose."

It wasn't so much Lawyer Fuzzer's dishonesty that made us hate him as it was his intended scheme of shoving old Patsy into the poorhouse. That sure was a dirty piece of work. Certainly, I concluded, hopeful that we could save the persecuted old man and fill his closing years with happiness, money meant everything to some people. A broken heart meant nothing at all.

Tar and feathers! Oh, baby! That's what the heartless old crook deserved, all right. Still, I guess Mr. Ott was doing more talking than anything else, honorable and upright citizen that he was. For the law says it's wrong to tar and feather people no matter how low-down they are. Sometimes, though, a fellow wonders if the law is all that it should be. To my notion it should protect unfortunates like old Patsy instead of favoring snakes like Fuzzer.

"Say, Pa," Poppy then spoke up, "are you very well acquainted with the old man who stopped here to-night to show us his curry comb?"

"Mr. Hoenoddle? I've seen him off an' on."

"Do you know anything about him?"

"Nothin' except that he sells fish an' builds boats. Still," the shaggy forehead puckered up, "let me think. Mr. Hadley *did* mention him to me. Now, what was it. Oh, yes! It was him, I believe, who led the searching party that found

the dead man in the forest. Kind of off in his upper story as I understand it."

Things were jumping through my head. Could it be, I quizzed myself excitedly, that the millionaire had been laid low by a crazy man whose wooden shoes, let us say, had been carved in the shape of hoofs?

Old Hoehandle was a woodworker, all right. And according to Poppy a skillful one, too. So the making of the wooden shoes would have been an easy job for him.

Ivory, Mr. Ott then pointed out to us in his closer examination of the miniature totem pole, was a tropical product. So it was most unlikely that the pocket piece had been carved in the frozen totem-pole regions unless the Indians up there, like the Russians, had tapped an ivory deposit in the ice. For it's true, all right, as he told us, that in bygone days such animals as elephants and mammoths used to roam the world over, poles and all.

Nor was that all that Poppy's pa pointed out to us, clever old man that he was. The carving, he said, was a comparatively recent piece of work. The sharp edges proved that. Much less than having been brought from Alaska, as we had suspected, it more probably had been carved within the past few days.

My head cluttered up with frozen mammoths, skulking wood-shed Indians and queer-eyed stovepipe hats, I wanted more than ever to run the strange mystery to earth to thus learn the Indian's peculiar secret. But it was time now for the abduction. The mystery had to wait.

However, I don't mind telling you here that it didn't wait long. I guess not. Queer things were crowding in on us as we were to learn before many hours had passed.

Grabbing the rope ladder, eager now to hasten the abduction, I ran outside with Poppy to help twist old Betsy's tail. But to our amazement there was no tail to twist. Old Betsy, tail and all, not forgetting her radiatorful of breakfast food, had completely melted away into the night.

The Strickers' work, of course. Crafty sneaks that they were they had taken this way of paying us back for the totem-pole deal.

CHAPTER X

THE BIG BATTLE

BID STRICKER isn't dumb. I'll say that for him. He's pulled more than one clever deal on us as my books tell, though, of course, having him out-classed on the brain business, he and his crummy gang always get the worst of it in the end.

What sort of favored him this trip was the fact that Poppy lived on a hill. So all he and his gang had to do after quietly shoving old Betsy into the street was to crowd into the single seat as best they could, probably one on top of another, and coast noiselessly the length of eight or ten city blocks into the very doorway of Zulu-town.

It was a clever trick, all right. And did Poppy and I ever kick ourselves in the seat of the pants for our dumb-headedness. As though the leader in taking after us would have given up that easy! He had kept out of sight to fool us, realizing that we'd be laying for him in the front yard. Later he had seen us go into the house. After which, of course, it was pie and ice cream for him

to put on the flivver evaporating act—the dirty skunk!

And just when we needed the old bus, too. Of course, we could make old Patsy walk. It was only three miles to the lake. But what kind of an abduction was that? Poof! Not worth a moment's thought. As Poppy had said, to do the job up right we simply had to rush the old man away in an automobile. That was proper. And we had to take him down a rope ladder, too.

It would have pleased Bid better, of course, if we had left the ignition key in the lock. But it was our good fortune that the starting key was parked neatly in Poppy's pocket. Which isn't saying, though, that Bid couldn't gym the wires between the switch and the spark plugs, thus closing the circuit. But that would take an hour or more. In the meantime various and sundry exciting things were liable to happen. For don't imagine for one minute that we were going to give up our nice four-dollar-and-forty-nine-cent gas chewer without a fight. I guess not. The abduction, as planned, would be delayed. But daybreak would find old Patsy safe and sound in the chosen hidden rooms.

It would be to our advantage, of course, to overtake the thieves as soon as possible. So, satisfied that we'd find them at the switchtrack,

or just the other side, we lit out for Zulutown lickety-cut, the trailing rope ladder stirring up a cloud of dust behind us.

"It's five against two," panted Poppy, grabbing a club that lay in the street. "But if you'll take Jimmy and Jum I'll take the other three."

Pretty soon we came to the switchtrack. And not a sign of the enemy. Zulutown lay just beyond. Stopping on the raised switchtrack, with sharpened eyes and ears, we spotted a dog skulking across the moonlit street. A cat hissed at the four-legged intruder. But beyond that all was silence, the whole neighborhood seemingly having parked itself in bed for the night.

Then who should poke his homely mug out of the adjacent weeds but Red Meyers!

Somehow I'm never surprised at anything Red does. If I died and went to heaven I'd expect to find him there ahead of me chewing a candy harp or nibbling on a slab of angel-food cake. He's liable to bob up at any place or at any time. But it's these very scattered ways of his, I guess, that makes him so interesting. Outside of his gab he sure is a swell kid, all right. Certainly, like Poppy, I sure was pleased to see him now. For while he's built on the order of an abbreviated summer sausage he can fight like a wildcat. And the more of us the better.

"My army," says he, in that important way of his, as Rory's and two other heads came into sight.

Peg Shaw! The peachiest scapper in the whole town. And Scoop Ellery, too. Oh, baby! Were we ever in luck. There'd be one gosh-awful massacre now. It was almost sinful to think about it.

"I suppose you heard about the explosion," says Red, before I could question him.

"What explosion?" says I.

"While I was eating supper to-night Bid Stricker put a charge of powder in my totem pole and blew it all to smithereens."

"And now you're laying for him, huh?" says I, getting happier every minute as I sort of visualized our combined forces marching into battle.

"Nothing else but. See the rotten tomatoes, Jerry. Three big piles."

"*See* 'em? Kid, I not only see 'em but I can smell 'em."

"And you're sure," Poppy put in, kind of puzzled-like, "that the Strickers didn't just pass here in an old automobile?"

Getting our story the others then told us that they had seen nothing of either old Betsy or the hated enemy. So we figured out that Bid had coasted into a side street where no doubt he

was now tinkering with the wires to close the ignition circuit.

To go back would be like sleuthing a needle in a haystack. For Bid had his choice of a dozen shadowy side streets. So we decided to stick it out where we were. Even if the enemy did get the car started, nothing in itself to worry about, we could stop them easy enough when they came to the switchtrack. For certainly, out of six husky tomato pitchers, all hot shots with the possible exception of Red, three at least could sock the driver in the face. Losing control of the car he and his gang would wind up in the weeds on one side of the road or the other. And then would we ever paste them. Oh, baby! They'd look like a staggering catchup factory when we got through with them. And they'd smell like a forsaken sauerkraut dump. Our revenge would be complete.

It was too bad, of course, that old Betsy had to be splattered up in the fracas. For suffer she would, all right. Still, careful aim would help a lot.

Scoop, of course, observing kid that he is, quickly spotted the rope ladder. And realizing that we were among friends we freely dished out the evening's intended program. The abduction was a scheme of ours, we said, to save a persecuted old man from being shoved into the

county poorhouse by a grasping, thieving lawyer. And any help that they could give us would be a thing to their credit.

The deep-voiced tower clock on College Hill boomed ten times, peculiarly reminding me of our "Whispering Mummy" adventures. The hour set for the abduction! Old Patsy, of course, tired of hiding in the attic, would wonder uneasily why we didn't show up. It was to be hoped, though, that he didn't get impatient and skin out.

Then from beyond the switchtrack came the gurgling, gulping, wheezing, rattling, clattering sound that we had been listening for. Old Betsy! Having succeeded in starting the old bus the Strickers were now headed for home. And if they thought at all of meeting Poppy and I it was their clever little intention to sail by us as big as cuffy. In our own car, mind you.

It ain't a-goin' to rain no more, no more,
It ain't a-goin' to rain no more.
We swiped their bus and they can't catch us—
For it ain't a-goin' to rain no more.

It was Bid, of course. Singing at the top of his voice. Oh, he was a clever little thing, all right. And so happy was he in his victory over us that he wanted the whole neighborhood to wake up and take notice.

I gritted my teeth. We couldn't catch him,

huh? Boy, what we had waiting for him. Six gooey tomatoes any one of which, to be technical, had a splattering area of ten square yards.

Twinkle, twinkle little car,
How they wonder where you are.
Jerry Todd and Poppy Ott—
Our nice car that they ain't got.

It was Jum Prater this time.

"Boy!" Poppy gritted in my ear. "If we ever miss that big mouth it'll be a wonder."

"Why miss it?" I giggled.

"'Twinkle, twinkle little car!' His head will 'twinkle, twinkle,' I'm telling you, before we get through with him."

Then Jimmy Stricker showed what a poet he was:

Poppy had a little car,
Its tires were made of rubber.
One night it followed us away,
Which made poor Poppy blubber.

"Did you hear that?" I snickered.

"Oh, yes!" came grimly. "I'm listening."

"You won't overlook Jimmy, huh?"

"Overlook him? Say, kid, when I get through with that bird his own mother won't recognize him."

"Hash?"

"No. Tomato soup."

"Don't forget, though," says I, "that we're to paste Bid first."

The moonlight was a big help to us. And at the first sight of the car as it came over the rise we jumped to our feet, letting out a yell that would have done credit to a whole band of bloodthirsty Indians. Then we let fly. Nor did a single one of us miss the target. Six juicy tomatoes, mind you. And each and every one of them kissed Biddy dear smack on the snout. Which I dare say was the biggest surprise that he ever got in all his life.

"Oh, oh!" he gurgled, dropping the steering wheel to claw the tomato seeds out of his eyes. "Rotten tomatoes."

"I'll say they're rotten. Oh, *gosh!* Just smell 'em."

"It's Poppy Ott and his gang."

"Look at 'em!"

"They've got us surrounded."

"Quit shovin' me."

"Oh, oh!"

"Sufferin' cats!"

"Sufferin' *me,* you mean."

"They've got bushels of 'em."

"JUDAS PRIEST!"

"Well, don't hang onto me."

Red dug into his pile of ammunition.

"You will blow up my totem pole, huh?" he

bellowed. "Take that, you big carp. And you, too, Jum Prater."

"And here's another one for you, Bid," Poppy bellowed in pattern as the uncontrolled car raced wildly down the grade, its squealing passengers jumping in all directions. Realizing that they were outnumbered they tried to run for home. But we closed in on them. And did we ever pepper them. Sweet doctor! The Germans never fired cannon balls any faster than we slam-banged those rotten tomatoes. Zip! *Zing!* BOOM! The story is still told in Zulutown that tomato juice dripped from the surrounding trees and telephone wires for a month.

Blood to the right of us and blood to the left of us—only the "blood," of course, was stinking tomato juice. Every time Jum squawked we aimed for his mouth filling it with tomato seeds faster than he could spit them out. Nor did he get any more than his share. Bu-lieve me no one was overlooked, least of all Bid himself. Boy, it sure was fun to paste him.

But duty called. So, leaving the others to carry on the "bloody" battle, Poppy and I scrambled onto old Betsy's cushioned back, now slippery with tomato seeds, and galloped away to the scene of the delayed abduction.

CHAPTER XI

OUR RUCKATUCK WITH THE LAWYER

To OUR surprise a big green automobile was parked in front of old Patsy's house. So, instead of galloping up to the front door in true Lochinvar style we sensibly parked our own wheezing gas buggy in the shadow of a gaping cottonwood tree several doors away.

Further mystified by the light in the old inventor's parlor where we had expected to find only complete darkness, we were about to tiptoe through the gate in guarded investigation when a surly voice stopped us.

"Well, what do you guys want?" a head popped into sight in the green car.

Young Fuzzer! And now a bulky, mountainous form with arms and legs of corresponding size wedged itself through the front door onto the porch. Boy, this was getting exciting.

"Did you say something, Clarence?" a familiar voice boomed.

"Oh," smarty yawned, "I was just talking to a couple of Zulutown rats."

"Too bad," I whispered to Poppy, "that we

wasted all of our nice tomatoes on the Strickers."

"Sh-h-h-h!" he pinched my hand.

Wider awake now smarty saw who the two "rats" really were.

"Hey, Pa," he yipped, jumping out of the car. "Here's that Ott kid now."

"Young man," the scowling lawyer descended on us in characteristic road-roller fashion, "what have you done with Mr. Corbin?"

"Me?" says Poppy, innocently.

"Yes, you," blurted smarty, his eyes spitting hatred. "You think you're smart helping that Davidson kid. Oh, I know. You've been monkeying with his carburetor. But a lot of good it'll do you as I'll prove in to-morrow's race."

"Then it's your opinion that we have no chance at all, huh?" smiled Poppy.

"*We,*" young Fuzzer picked on the word sort of sneering-like. "You would like to put yourself in Art Davidson's class."

"And why not?" came pleasantly.

But if Poppy knew how to hold his temper the rich boy didn't. And what particularly angered the latter, I guess, was the unconcerned way in which the hated one talked back to him.

"Say, you better shut up," he boiled over. "For I know what you were before Jerry Todd picked you up—though, to that point, you're two of a kind."

"Then you've heard," says Poppy, still as cool as a cucumber, "that I used to be a tramp?"

"*Tramp* is right," the word was emphasized sneeringly. "And probably a thieving, begging tramp, too."

I exploded then. Not that I cared a whang-doodle, as Bill Hadley says, what the young smart aleck said about me. But I could have beaned him for insulting my bully good chum.

"Knock his beezer off, Poppy," I danced. "Don't let him talk to you that way. You can lick him."

"Well, well," young smarty then looked me up and down sort of sneering-like. "Who let Fido in?"

But Poppy motioned me down.

"Never," says he, in the same even voice, "have I tried to cover up the fact that I used to be a tramp. Not that I'm proud of it. Nor will I say, either, that I'm ashamed of it. It's just a part of my early life that I've left behind. When you say, though, that I was a thieving, begging tramp you're a liar. And a double liar at that. I never stole a penny in all my life."

"Don't you dare call me a liar," blustered Fuzzy.

"Well, be careful then what you say about me."

But the rich boy wasn't content to drop the matter there.

"You better keep away from our lake, too," he further blustered.

"Why?"

"Because I said so, that's why. You've no right hanging around there anyway."

"The lake's public property."

"Like so much mud. It belongs to the shore owners."

Poppy then pulled a clever one.

"What part do you own?" says he sort of purring-like. "The bottom?"

"Say . . . I'll sock you."

"Anyone would think from the way you race up on the fishing boats that you owned it all."

"Old Hoenoddle hasn't any right to clutter up the lake with rented fishing boats. And Pa says I can run rings around them all I want to. If the fishers don't like it let them go and fish in the river. We'll be glad to get rid of them."

"One time you tried running rings around us," says Poppy kind of grim-like, "and you know what happened. The next time we'll use rotten eggs and aim at your head."

Boy, I thought there would be a scrap then. And so as to be ready in case old fatty took sides with his young offspring I grabbed a fence picket, getting a nice line on that smooth bald head.

But the lawyer wasn't dumb.

"Enough of that," he spoke sharply. Then

he wheeled on Poppy. "Gimme that paper," he commanded.

"What paper?" says Poppy, taken by surprise.

"The one that Mr. Corbin signed for you this afternoon in the kitchen."

"Oh! . . ." Poppy's eyes sought mine.

"One of my men saw you," a fat hand was thrust out. "So fork it over. And be quick about it, too."

"But I haven't got it with me."

"Where is it?"

"My pa's got it."

"What's he doing with it?" the lawyer's scowl deepened.

"I asked him to lock it up in the factory safe."

Which proved to Fuzzer that the paper was valuable.

"Um . . ." he screwed his scowl around. "What was it?"

"A bill of sale," says Poppy truthfully.

"Covering what?"

"That's my business."

"Young man," the thunderous voice raised itself to a higher peak, "I want that paper."

But did Poppy quail? Not so you could notice it.

"Aren't you afraid, Mr. Fuzzy—"

"Fuzzer's my name," the lawyer snapped in. "F-u-z-z-e-r," he bawled out each separate letter.

"Well, as I was going to say," Poppy continued sweetly, "aren't you afraid, Mr. F-u-z-z-e-r, that you're liable to burst a blood vessel? My, how red your face is."

"Insolence!" the deep voice bellowed.

"Let me sock him, Pa," smarty pumped his fists.

"Go ahead and sock," dared Poppy, shoving out a hard looking mug.

Again the lawyer interfered. And now there was a look in his beady eyes that made me think of steel bullets.

"Unless that paper is delivered into my hands before ten o'clock to-morrow morning," says he, sort of measuring each separate word, "I'll go to law to recover it."

"But it isn't yours," says Poppy. "It's mine. So what right has the law to take it away from me and give it to you? Besides, I'm going to be very busy to-morrow morning at ten o'clock."

The crafty lawyer wanted to find out all he could.

"Busy?" he repeated, studying the speaker's face.

"Yes; beating your son in a motor-boat race."

Smarty hooted.

"*You* beat *me?* That's funny."

"I think myself," nodded Poppy, "that it's going to be funny."

"Given complete charge of Mr. Corbin's affairs," the lawyer spoke importantly, "with orders to arrange for his permanent transfer to the poorhouse, no one has any legal right to sign papers relative to the disposition of his effects, personal or otherwise, except me. So, young man, you can see where you stand."

"Anyway," says Poppy, undisturbed, "I'm going to keep the paper until I get my money back."

That paper was a big mystery to the lawyer. It worried him, too.

"Um. . . . A bill of sale, you say."

Here Poppy got his eyes on something in the lighted parlor.

"Oh, look," he cried, clutching my arm.

"What?" says I dumbly.

"Our organ."

Our organ. This was the first I knew that we had an organ except possibly our gizzards and organs like that.

Old fatty swallowed the bait.

"Oh! . . ." says he, rubbing his pudgy hands. "Then it was the organ that you bought. How much did you pay down?"

"Ten dollars," says Poppy.

"It's worth twenty."

"Of course. But I'm not going to pay you."

"Then you came here to-night at this late hour expecting to see Mr. Corbin?"

"Yes, sir."

"And to take away the organ?"

"Oh, no! I just wanted to play a tune on it."

Him play a tune on an organ. I thought I'd bust. For I knew for a fact that he couldn't even twiddle the tail of a jew's-harp.

Old fatty's face was clouded with suspicion.

"Do you know what I think, young man?"

"What?" says Poppy cheerfully.

"The paper Mr. Corbin signed instead of being a bill of sale, as you'd like to have me believe, has something to do with the old man's flight. For even granting that you were interested in the organ why should you go to him to buy it? I put it up for sale, though like the other truck that you see in the house nobody bid on it."

"In which case," says Poppy shrewdly, "it may not be worth twenty dollars."

"Folderol!"

"Anyway," says Poppy, starting for the lighted house, the front door of which still stood wide open, "I wouldn't want to pay twenty dollars for the organ unless I knew for sure that the mice hadn't nibbled holes in the bellows."

Then, can you imagine it, he strutted into the house just as big as cuffy. Screwing up the wabbly organ stool he made a regular Paderew-

ski squat after which, having carefully dusted the dingy keys with his elbow, he yanked out seven or eight stops and started pumping. *Squeak! Squeak! Squeak!* Then as he slam-banged the keys, sort of favoring the ones on the left end, the organ began to bellow like a bull with a bur under its tail.

But if his song was far from being musical it sure was clever, as you probably will agree with me, bearing in mind, of course, that the attic contained a pair of probable sharpened ears.

How do you do, Roly-Poly, how do you do?
How do you do, Roly-Poly, how do you do?
Do you know that your fat pod
Outweighs all of Jerry Todd?
How do you do, Roly-Poly, how do you do?

Then came the second verse:

How do you do, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, how do you do?
How do you do, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, how do you do?
As a racer you're a dub,
We will sure give you a rub.
How do you do, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, how do you do?

Then came the verse of real importance:

How do you do, Patsy Corbin, how do you do?
How do you do, Patsy Corbin, how do you do?
We can hear you in the air,
Just be patient, we'll be there.
How do you do, Patsy Corbin, how do you do?

The recital completed, so to speak, the great artist arose from the wabbly stool and sort of swept to the front door.

"Please don't applaud," says he grandly, addressing the Fuzzers who, having followed us into the house, now stood cockeyed one on each side of the room, "for applause always upsets my noives."

Well, I wasn't going to have him get all the pop-eyed attention. So out came my imaginary lorgnette.

"It was a most chawming recital," I swished simpering-like, turning my imaginary long-handled eyeglass first on one of the gaping pair and then on the other. "Really a most excruciating recital, don't you know. And so collegiate." Then as I passed through the door I sort of flipped up my coat-tail. And you can believe it or not but old fatty almost fell over backwards.

What befuddled him, I guess, was the knowledge that he had been worsted by two boys. Suspicious of us, yet lacking any real proof that we had aided old Patsy in the latter's supposed flight, he had tried in his bellowing way to bulldoze us into telling what we knew.

But we had met geezers like him before.

"Stop 'em, Pa," smarty came to life. "For that Ott kid knows where old Patsy is. He does, I tell you. That's what he and the old man were

scheming about in the kitchen. And that's why he's hanging around here now."

But what chance had a three-hundred-pound lard pail of catching a pair of nimble-legged kids like us!

"And what now?" says I, when, after circling, we wound up in old Patsy's weedy back yard.

Poppy got his breath.

"It's a matter of waiting, I guess, until they clean out for home."

"What are they doing here anyway?"

"Waiting for old Patsy to come home, I guess."

"As though he would."

"It's a chance, they think."

"Gosh. I hope the old man doesn't tip anything over in the attic."

"Look, Jerry," the other then gripped my arm. "There goes young Fuzzer in the car."

"Yes," says I, using my own eyes, "and there's old fatty on the back porch blowing his nose."

The door slammed as the human bloodhound went back into the house. Creeping closer we saw him making a bed for himself on a couch. Then the lights went out.

CHAPTER XII

AN EXCITING RESCUE

I BEGAN to wonder, as we lay side by side in the weeds, nicely attended by appreciative mosquitoes, with Benny Corker's crummy dog coming along every few minutes to smell us over Limburger-cheese fashion and then lick us rejoiceful-like on the back of the neck, if we ever would get old Patsy abducted.

We had started out all right. And we had everything necessary to complete the job, including a ball of heavy twine for pulling up the rope ladder. But one thing after another had bobbed up to head us off. And now on top of all the other delays we had to continue the recess while old Fuzzer connected with the sandman. For it was useless to think of doing anything until the ogre was sound asleep. And even then, much less than getting fun out of the job, as we had talked of at first, we were running big risks.

"We should have brought along a feather bed," I yawned wearily.

"Don't complain, Jerry. Think of old Patsy."

"Look!" I pointed, as a haggard, lined face,

the eyes of which were sunken wells, appeared at the moonlit attic window. "There he is now."

"The poor old man," Poppy's natural sympathy came to the surface. "I bet he's a bundle of sweat. For you know what an attic is like on a hot night like this, especially a small attic such as his."

"Shall I get the rope ladder?" I spoke eagerly.

"No; lay still."

And it is well, let me tell you, that I did lay still. For a moment later the sly old ogre himself came out of the front door, in that heavy, ponderous way of his, yet kind of panther-like at that, and started around the house, his gimlet eyes boring holes into the adjacent shadows and nearby hiding places. Once I thought he spotted us, for he bore down on us beeline-fashion. Then everything was deadly quiet. And did we ever hug the ground. For he was listening now with ears that matched his cat-like eyes.

But all he heard was the crickets and bullfrogs, many of which, with reference to the latter, came out of the canal at night to forage through the Zulutown gardens. Nor did a single twitching weed betray our hiding place. For we knew our stuff. So finally he got into gear again, like the pussy-footed hippopotamus that he was, and disappeared at the back of the house between the kitchen and the wood shed.

Here something creaked over our heads.

"Poppy!" I gurgled. "Old Patsy's raising the window."

"Oh, my gosh!" the other sort of collapsed.

Halfway up, the window stuck. And then as the pottering prisoner tugged at it, it shot to the top with a bang. Which, as you can imagine, brought the two-legged hippopotamus back to the scene on the run.

But somehow as his furtive eyes swept here and there in quick investigation it never occurred to him to look *up*. So he missed seeing the turtle-like head as it stretched slowly from under its shell and then quickly popped back again out of sight. But we saw it. And did our hearts ever suffer.

Having escaped the lawyer's searching eyes only by a miracle, we were now hopeful that Patsy would cut out the crazy turtle stuff and behave himself until we had an opportunity to help him. But the prisoner, I guess, wearied by the long wait was completely balled up. Realizing that he had pulled a boner he sought to correct it in the only way he knew how. And it was this final dumb-bell stunt of his that led to his detection.

Down came the creaking window (imagine that!) inch by inch. Nor did Fuzzer, as he stood below with sharpened ears and beady eyes,

move a single muscle so far as we could see. A stone statue couldn't have been more rigid and tense-like. Then, cat-like, having found his man, he went back into the house. The lights came on. And horrified we saw him start on tiptoes up the steep attic stairs.

One time I read a story about a boa constrictor that stealthily trailed a wild pig until it caught the coveted porker fast asleep in a cave. With the solid wall at its back and the ravenous snake in front, the awakened pig had no chance at all. It began to squeal bloody-murder. And then, like a flash, the snake struck. Glub-glub-glub! The poor little piggy was no more.

In a moment or two I told myself shuddering-like, as I stood outside the window, we'd hear the same kind of a squeal and its accompanying glub-glub-glub from the attic.

Then Poppy gave me a shove.

"For the love of mud, Jerry," he panted, "are you going to stand there like a ninny and let the old man lose his head?"

"But what can we do?" I cried helplessly.

"Lots of things," the words were snapped at me. "While I'm getting the rope ladder pitch a rock through the attic window. And when old Patsy shows up tell him to hoist the window quick and be ready to catch. Then beat it across the street and start the car."

The two-legged snake was now halfway up the attic stairs. Nor did he pause for more than a moment or two when my rock crashed through the window over his head. Suspecting us it probably puzzled him to understand why we were pitching rocks at the house. But it never occurred to him that two boys would attempt to drag the supposedly cornered "pig" down a rope ladder.

For that matter, if a riskier scheme could be imagined I'd like to hear about it. And how Poppy ever put it across in such abbreviated time is beyond me—quite as much of a mystery I might add, with reference to my own work, as were those blamed wires that Bid had tangled up on us. Gosh, what a mess. I couldn't make head nor tail of it.

There was a terrific bellow from the attic when the tricked boa constrictor discovered the rope ladder dangling from the upper window. Then as he caught sight of the escaped "pig" scooting for cover he started pell-mell down the stairs. But here he met with difficulty. For Poppy had cleverly switched off the lights. And you know how scared a fat man is of falling!

Never very bright acting at any time, old Patsy, I dare say, would have hobbled off down the street if I hadn't yipped to him. Then as the tumult increased within the darkened cottage

I further pricked up my ears. Bumpety-bumpety-bumpety—bump! Old fatty, it seems, miscalculating his steps, had skidded the whole length of the attic stairs on the broad seat of his pants. Then over went the organ and a cupboardful of dishes.

Overtaking old Patsy in the middle of the street, and hooking arms with him the better to hurry him along, Poppy came up just as I gave the crank a final despairing turn. But old Betsy was decent. And having had her fun with me she now got down to business. Nor could any music have sounded half as sweet to us as did the clatter of her dear little cylinders.

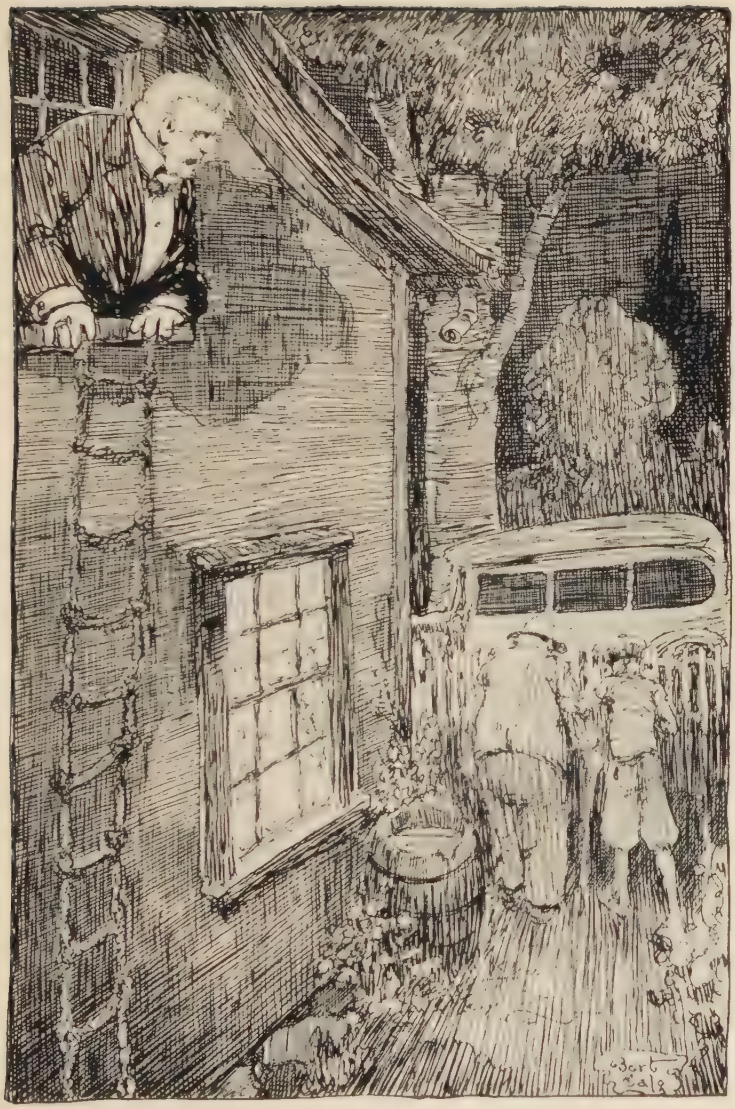
Having fallen over the organ and various other pieces of furniture that had been shoved in the way, old fatty finally percolated staggering-like through the front door.

"Stop!" he bellowed, tumbling into the street to head us off.

"Bump him, Poppy," I yipped.

And bu-lieve me we would have bumped him, too, good and plenty, if he hadn't had the good sense to jump out of our way. Even so we grazed the seat of his pants, already messed up by his hilarious flight down the attic stairs. And *mad!* Say, he fairly frothed at the mouth. And what he threatened to do to us. Oh, baby!

Old Betsy's tires picked up big gobs of "blood"



THERE WAS A TERRIFIC BELLOW FROM THE ATTIC WINDOW.

Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem. *Page* 117

as we mounted the switchtrack, from the crest of which, in the moonlight, we could see the defeated Stricker gang trailing home from the adjacent canal where, as we learned later on, they had spent an exciting and quarrelsome hour combing the tomato seeds out of each other's pompadours. We waved to them as we started down the other side of the embankment, but much less than returning our cheery greeting they wouldn't even look at us, so thoroughly did they hate us. Then after a quick run up the sleeping hill, we turned south into the bumpy river road, soon leaving the lights of Tutter behind us.

Just before we hit the long bridge over the Illinois river old Betsy developed a bad coughing spell. Regular T. B. stuff. But it was no time now to dish out first aid, Poppy yelled, fearing pursuit. So we kept on at high speed, hopeful that the wabbly pistons and other thing-a-ma-bobs in the sufferer's tin stomach would hold out until we hit Art's place, now two miles ahead of us.

We had hard work climbing the long winding hill beyond the river, two cylinders, it seems, having completely expired on us. But though they were "dead" so far as developing power was concerned they sure didn't sound dead. Boy, oh, boy, what a racket! Then by way of variety, a tire blew up.

Old Patsy, I guess, used to a rather quiet life among his files and screwdrivers, was beginning to wish that we had left him at home in the attic, there to be devoured peacefully by the gluttonous boa constrictor. For a scareder pair of eyes you never saw in all your born days. At times where the bumps were nice and numerous his under jaw sagged clean to his top vest button. And I had to keep shoving up on it (meaning his jaw, of course, and not the vest button) to keep him from strangling to death on the June bugs and similar winged truck that cluttered the night air.

Bang! Another tire. But we still had two left. So why worry? And now the racket was further increased as the flat tires in tearing themselves to pieces, merrily thumped the rusted fenders with each revolution of the wheels. Sort of like this: THUMP-ety-THUMP-ety-THUMP-ety-THUMP.

People meeting us in the public road almost stared their eyes out. And one red-nosed toper thinking, I guess, that the devil was chasing him, swung so far out of the road that he scraped the bark from a projecting tree trunk.

To reach the lake we had to dip down a long bumpy hill. And it was here, as we hit it up to sixty miles an hour (more or less), that we lost one of our beautiful headlights. Up it went like a comet and down it came in a million pieces,

like the clock that Red Meyers fixed for his mother. Then the radiator blew up, showering us with cooked breakfast food. Poor old Betsy! She had served us faithfully; but her end was come. Nor did we kick now that we had to abandon her, loyal old road-louse that she was. For we were within sight of the impressive stone arch which marks the private entrance to the grounds of Gnome Towers.

The home of the ghost with the hoof-marked chest! I had a queer chilly feeling in my backbone as we passed under the massive arch. Then I kind of laughed at myself for my foolish fears. As though there really was such a thing as a ghost. Poof! Nothing like that could scare me.

But let me tell you what happened.

CHAPTER XIII

WHAT PATSY TOLD US

Old Patsy's coughing apparatus got tangled up with another gob of June bugs as we legged it down the moonlit winding drive with its parallel walls of obscuring trees and crowded shrubbery. Farther on, where the extensive grounds adjoined the irregular lake shore, we'd find wide stretches of ornamented lawn as smooth as a bald head and as green as Mrs. Maloney's plush parlor set. But here the scheme was to let nature fiddle around to suit herself. Nor was it intended that the passing motorists and other rubber-necks out in full force on Saturday afternoons and Sundays should see beyond the natural vine-tangled barrier. Not that the property owner was doing things in his summer home that he was ashamed of. But rich men like Mr. Davidson get tired of being rubbered at.

Finally the cougher had to stop.

"And what now?" says I kind of impatient-like. "A bat?"

"They's somethin' in my larynx," gurgled the

old man, wondering, I guess, what a "bat" had to do with his coughing spell.

"Look out!" I then pulled another bright one. "There comes an owl."

Poppy, though, kind-hearted kid that he is, quickly checked me up on that.

"Don't get fresh, Jerry. Remember that he's an old man. And least of all should we poke fun at him."

So I reached out and took one of the hairy hands. I was kind of gentle about it, too. For I wanted him to know, as I helped him along, that I was his friend even though he did use his big mouth for a bug catcher.

"Jest as I told you when we was crossin' the river bridge," the old man then developed a talkative streak, his wabbly knees sort of keeping time with his wagging jaw, "he had on a soot jest like a street-keer conductor, cap an' everything. One of them stiff caps. He wasn't no street-keer conductor, though. Nope. I soon found that out."

Poppy looked at me.

"What's he talking about, Jerry?"

"Search me," I shrugged.

"Um . . ." the old man then turned a pair of hard eyes on me. " 'Tain't no wonder you don't know what I'm talkin' about, you young smart

aleck. Fur every time I started my story you shet me up, you did."

"Me?" I stared, wondering if we ought to put him in a straight-jacket before he got too violent.

"Yes, *you,"* he fired back. "Jest like *that,"* he demonstrated, pushing himself under the jaw.

Well, say, I thought I'd bust.

"Anyway," I laughed, "we couldn't have heard a word you said. For the car was too noisy. But if the story's important," I added, curious over his "street-keer" talk, "suppose you dish it out now."

"Let's squat," says he, as an ornamental road-side seat came into sight just ahead of us. "Fur my laigs air beginnin' to peter out on me. An' I find myself wonderin' whar we're headed fur."

Poppy did the talking.

"This is the Gnome Towers estate, Mr. Corbin."

"Yep. I recognize the place."

"A boy friend of ours lives here. Art Davidson is his name. And it's on his outboard motor that we're going to test your carburetor."

The old man's eyes twinkled as his memory got to work.

"An' you let on to ol' Fuzzer that it was my organ that you bought. You're a sly one, you

be. I swan! When you first started punishin' that organ I thought you was crazy. Then I caught on when you come to the tail-end of your song."

"We were lucky," said Poppy, "that Fuzzer didn't catch on."

"Him an' that b'y of his'n did considerable talkin' about you before you come," Patsy then told the leader. "An' the kid give it as his opinion that you was helpin' me. The ol' man, though, wouldn't see it that way at first. Why should you help me, says he—an' me listenin', mind you, with both ears. We was no relation to each other, he says. You done truck like that before, the kid says. You helped an ol' gol'fish lady—I think it was Potter Warmley's widder—an' you helped other people, too. An' me bein' your friend, even if we wasn't relations, what more likely, the kid says, than that you was helpin' me. Fur they both knew about you talkin' to me in the kitchen which is what led up to their talk. Then you showed up, along with Jerry, which proved things jest as the kid had said. . . . It's funny, though," the wrinkled forehead puckered up, "that Fuzzer hasn't missed that carburetor of his'n before this."

"He's been too busy looking for you to check up on his purchase."

"Even so," waggled the old man, "he'll know whar to look fur the carburetor when he does discover his loss."

"Of course," nodded Poppy. "But that doesn't worry us. We expect, too, that he'll pronounce our bill of sale illegal. But he's got to go to law to prove it, which will take time. And while he's doing that Jerry and I'll be doing other useful things."

"In case we aren't in jail," I reminded cheerfully.

"Listen, Jerry, he can't put us in jail for helping an old man in distress. For that's contrary to the whole Boy Scout scheme. And while we have a part of his washing machine, as you might say, we certainly didn't come by it dishonestly. So we have nothing to fear from him so far as the law is concerned. Oh, he'll blat at us, of course, thinking because we're mere boys that he can scare us. And failing in that he may threaten to get nasty. But let him. Two can play at that game."

Old Patsy then told us more about the man in the "street-keer" uniform.

"Spottin' him as soon as he come into the yard jest before six o'clock I thought at first that he was a street-keer conductor, as I say. But when Fuzzer started tellin' him about *me* bein' crazy an' not safe to be runnin' loose I saw right off

that he was a guard from the crazy ward of the county poor farm. So you see Fuzzer not only intended to shove me into the poorhouse, but by tellin' lies on me, makin' out that I was crazy an' a menace to the public, as he called it, he figgered on gittin' me locked up in a padded cell whar no attention would be paid to my talk. The dirty scoundrel! An' to think that I used to trust him. They hain't no place in hell half hot enough fur skunks like him. As fur that smart son of his'n, if you ever git the chance to paste him one on the snout I sure hope you don't get struck down with paralysis before you finish the job. The lyin' puppy. He said I was crazy, too."

Poppy waited until the indignant old man sort of composed himself.

"As I told you, Mr. Corbin, we're going to try out your carburetor to-morrow morning in a fifteen-mile motor-boat race. And if we win it's going to be a big thing for you."

Tears came into the faded eyes.

"Poppy, whatever would I 'a' done without you? God bless you fur the good b'y that you be to thus help an ol' man in his hour of trouble, an' may the world produce many more like you. I know you enjoy doin' this fur me. Don't think, though, if the carburetor *is* a money-making success that I'm goin' to keep all the profits. No, sir. Every other dollar is your'n; one dollar

fur you an' one fur me. An' I'm not so sure that I won't make it two fur you so you kin split up with Jerry. Fur I owe almost as much to him as I do to you."

"It's your money," says Poppy firmly, "and we want you to have it all."

"Absolutely," I put in. Of course, he could make us a present of a new Ford if he wanted to, or a ton of candy. That would be all right. But we didn't want any of the regular profits. However, it was too early to hint around about the candy. For he was still poorer than dirt. And the "profits" that we talked about so glowingly were a sort of pipe-dream. Still, with old Poppy jiggling the helm I felt sure that we could make the dream come true.

"Wa-al," says the old man, in that slow way of his, "we won't argue now about a division of the profits. . . . An' you say the Davidson b'y lives here?"

"Yes. And this is where you're going to live, too."

"Me?" the wrinkled face showed mingled surprise and uneasiness. "In this swell house?"

"Now that you're going to be rich," laughed Poppy, "the sooner you get used to swell things the better. For you'd feel foolish to have Mr. Edison drop in some afternoon to compare in-

ventions with you and find you ordering your dress suit out of a mail-order catalog."

"I swan! It seems like a fairy tale. *Me* rich. Why, Poppy, I have no hankerin' at all to be rich. I jest want enough to see me through my ol' age."

"I was told the other day," says Poppy, "that in America alone the production of outboard motors totals almost a quarter of a million yearly. And why not a Corbin carburetor on each and every motor sold. I believe it's possible."

"A quarter of a million dollars," says the old man, fixing the royalty on the carburetors at a dollar apiece. Then he laughed. "Hain't we the ninnies," says he, "to go countin' our chickens before they're hatched? . . . I'd be satisfied with a thousand dollars a year."

"Milwaukee is an outboard motor center," says Poppy, who picks up more junk of that kind than any kid I ever knew. "And that is where Mr. Davidson builds his motor cycles. So, if he's anything like Art, I bet he'll help us, though, for the time being, Mr. Corbin, you'd best keep out of sight."

That mystified the old man.

"Art is in on the secret," Poppy then explained. "But we aren't going to tell his pa or ma. There's hidden rooms in the big house. No one ever goes in them, Art says. And there's where

you're going to live for the next few days| Nor need you worry about grub or anything like that. For Art will take care of you. He's a good kid, Mr. Corbin. You'll like him."

"Jest a minute," the old man held out a hairy hand. "Hidden rooms, you say. Be you talkin' about that secret room back of the big fire-place whar me an' ol' Peaceful Hoenoddle buried the corpse?"

Gee-miny crickets gosh! I almost jumped out of my skin.

"Corpse!" I cried, as a million things danced madly in my head. "Whose corpse are you talking about?—Mr. Gnome's?"

My excitement kind of amused the old man.

"It wasn't a real corpse, Jerry; jest a sort of make believe one. I s'pose I should 'a' told you so right out instead of skeerin' you. You see," the story was begun, "I used to come here right often when ol' Peaceful was the head gardener. Fur we was ol' acquaintances, him an' me. A queer ol' coot. Always talkin' about crimes. He'd read up in the newspapers about a certain crime. An' then he'd tell me how *he* would 'a' committed it if it'd bin him. They was one particular crime. As I recall a butcher who felt that his wife was kind of onnecessary in the family got rid of her. But they found enough hairs an' toenails in the furnace to convict him. Which

served him right, ol' Peaceful said. Fur that was no way to git rid of a body. Sartinly, not the way *he* would 'a' done it. Then to show me what was proper accordin' to his notion he made a corpse out of wood, all fixed up in an ol' dress, an' I watched him fur a hul hour one stormy night while he buried it under a tile floor. As I say, it was in the secret room behind the big fireplace. They was other secret rooms, too. But I didn't look around much. I was too oneasy, what with the thunder an' lightin' an' that glitterin'-eyed ol' coot takin' up the tiles, one by one, his hands tremblin', an' later clearin' up all the dirt until mind you not a single trace of his work showed. 'That's the way,' says he, fixin' his glitterin' eyes on me, 'to conceal a corpse. Furnaces leave clues. An' corpses put in the ground under hen houses an' sech always git disturbed. But this corpse will stay hid furever.' . . . An' so fur as I know it's still thar. But I kind of dropped him after that. Too blamed queer to suit me."

"Did you know Mr. Gnome, too?" I had the eager question waiting for him.

"Slightly."

"Did he and Hoenoddle ever quarrel?"

"Quarrel? You wouldn't expect that, would you, between an employer an' his hired hand?"

"But did they?" I persisted.

"Not that I know of."

"Did you ever see them together?"

"Many times."

"And Hoenoddle never showed any hatred for the other?"

"Not that I noticed."

"Did you know about Mr. Gnome's queer habit of sleeping outdoors?"

"Yes; Hoenoddle told me about it."

"But neither of you knew why the rich man did it?"

"I didn't."

"How about Hoenoddle?"

"I kain't answer fur him."

"Did you ever talk with him after Mr. Gnome's death?"

"Once or twice."

"Was that crime done to his satisfaction?"

"Um . . ." the thin eyes sought mine. "Never heerd that it was a crime."

Well, it was a crime," I cried. "I have proof. And the proof leads right to Hoenoddle's back door."

I shouldn't have said it, of course. It wasn't a bit detective-like. For good detectives don't blab their stuff ahead of time. But I was carried away with excitement.

Then a cold horror sort of crept over me as the bushes behind us slowly parted. Inch by

inch. Out came a hand; then a long hairy arm; then a whole body.

"Fuzzer won't be liable to find your keer tonight," says a familiar high-pitched cackling voice, "fur I shoved it into a ditch an' covered it with weeds. Still, he's keen. So to play safe you better git in the house as soon as you kin, all three of you."

After which the speaker started down the road in the direction of the lake, his crooked cane going thump! thump! thump!

"An' don't furgit," he added, speaking over his shoulder, "to stop in to-morrow an' see my new boat."

Like me Poppy was spellbound. But he recovered his voice as the pottering figure disappeared from our sight around a bend in the moonlit driveway.

"Listen!" a hand clutched my arm.

Out of the air, seemingly from directly over our heads, came the weirdest tittering sound that I ever heard in all my life. It fairly chilled my blood. Gosh! Old Hoenoddle, of course. Having overheard us he wanted us to know that he was without fear of us. Still, granting that the jeering, littering laugh was his, how was it possible for him, now several hundred feet away, to throw his voice directly in our ears?

Ventriloquism? Or was he a wizard?

CHAPTER XIV

A SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

So OLD Hoenoddle was interested in crimes, was he? Naturally he would be. It gave me the creeps, though, to think of him burying that wooden corpse. Of all the nutty stuff. Still, he probably had a secret reason for the gruesome act. For I was convinced now that much less than being goofy, as his neighbors suspected, he had a crafty secret reason for everything he did, including his trip to Zulutown that afternoon in time for the auction and his latter visit to Poppy's house. His dumbness was a sort of mask.

The brain that he kept hidden in a seemingly solid hunk of ivory was as keen as a polished jackknife. His sort of uncanny knowledge of things proved that. There was the outboard motor now fitted up, for racing purposes, with a new carburetor. He knew all about this supposedly secret work and the desirability of it. Seemingly, too, he had been in Zulutown during the recent abduction and so was hep to the latest developments in that quarter. Wherever we

went he was hot on our trail, apparently as well informed on our plans and the need of these as we were. As I say, it was uncanny, not only his knowledge of things, both ours and Fuzzer's, but his movements as well.

Having left the road-threaded thicket behind us we now pumped our legs across a velvety lawn in the direction of the big stone house which, with its moonlit turrets, now seemed more castle-like than ever. I tried to pick out the hidden rooms as we hurried along, wondering kind of queer-like if the wooden corpse was the only secret of its kind that had been tucked away under the concealing tile floor.

The grounds of Gnome Towers is a paradise for birds, the original owner during his lifetime having done everything in his power to attract them, shutting out the neighborhood's innumerable cats and putting up suitable houses on poles and in trees. Mr. Davidson in turn, a lover of birds as well, as all sensible people should be, had preserved these many scattered houses, though I never heard that the appreciative feathered tenants followed him around eating out of his fingers and pecking playful-like at his ears and hair as was the odd story that the older servants had told about their master.

I mention the birds, because we saw many of them in the moonlight as we crossed the lawn.

Black flashes that marked the lightning-like flight of foraging bats; owls of various sizes, some as small as doughnuts and one old granddaddy who had a wing spread of several feet.

Why is it that bats always make a fellow think of ghosts? It was so with me now. And I didn't like it for two cents. Was it true, as Mrs. Maloney had said, that bats and owls, in their preference for graveyards, see things that human beings can't see? Come to think of it, owls do have fearfully big eyes.

What crazy thoughts! . . . I was glad when we came to the east sun parlor where the expected string dangled from an open upper window. Smart little Arthur, though, to save his big toe, had cleverly tied the other end of the string to a tin pan which now clattered to the floor, following which racket a familiar tousled tow-head came quickly into sight.

"Hurry, Art," Poppy returned the other's warm greeting in a quick guarded voice. "For old Fuzzer's liable to show up any minute."

Which was true, all right. For by now the lawyer undoubtedly had his car, and what more likely than that he would race up and down the various country roads in search of us. Nor was it improbable that his sharp eyes would spot the wreck in the ditch notwithstanding the fact that

the old car according to Hoenoddle's story had been covered with weeds.

Telling us to wait at a side door Art took less than a minute on the stairs, admitting us in his pajamas. And as this was my first visit to the big house I looked around with considerable curiosity. Some swell dump, all right. Carpets, mind you, an inch thick and whole rooms paneled in oak and mahogany. Not used to walking on polished floors such as these old Patsy skidded and almost broke his neck. But that was all right. For he was awake now. Which made it easier for Poppy and I to sort of drag him along.

"I' swan!" he further came to life as a dignified clock looked back at him from the paneled walls. "Is that thar timepiece tellin' us the truth?"

I, too, had spotted the clock the hands of which, having climbed to a midnight peak, were now well started down the slope of a new day. And realizing that the leader and I still faced a three-mile walk into town I found myself wondering in mounting uneasiness if the young son and heir in the Todd family wasn't liable to suffer serious casualties when he finally faced mamma and papa on the inside of the long-watched parlor door.

There, however, fortune was with us, as I learned when Poppy quietly called up his pa. My parents it seems, having been summoned to Mendoto to sit up with a sick aunt, had arranged to have me stay all night with my chum. So now all we had to do was to get Mr. Ott's ready permission to spend the balance of the night here, Art having told us that there were beds for all.

Oh, sweet bundle of feathers! Lead me to it, I said. For like old Patsy I was weaving now. But I kind of perked up when I was shown the nifty hidden door in the panels beside the main fireplace. Beyond was a gloomy hall-like passageway of considerable length, built into the stone walls, giving at the end into a room about twelve feet square which in turn had its own fireplace under the tile floor of which the wooden corpse had been put away.

There were ventilators—chimney-like affairs—high up in the stone walls, but no windows. A sort of prison, as you might say. And how peculiar must have been the mental machinery of the man, was my thought, who had built this queer place. Was this his hiding place? And had he abandoned it when the feared gardener penetrated its secret entrance?

"Dad thinks this part of the house is junk," Art told us, as he guided us through the adjoining

rooms to get from one to the other of which we had to pass through secret doors like the one beside the main fireplace, only here, instead of wooden panels, the hidden doors were huge blocks of stone.

The peculiar rooms fascinated me.

"And this," I began curiously, "is where your housekeeper saw the—"

"Ker-CHOO!" sneezed Poppy, only, of course, it wasn't a real sneeze. Then he kicked me in the shins. "For the love of mud," he hissed into my ear. "Lay off the ghost stuff unless you want old Patsy to streak it for home."

"There's more hidden rooms below," Art told us. "And tunnels, too, one of which goes off into the woods in the direction of the Vermillion River."

"Which is interesting," I yawned, thinking of the spooky tunnel in the "Pedigreed Pickle" book. "But please let's not do any tunnel exploring tonight. For I have a weak heart."

"And you're sure," Poppy pinned Art down, "that your father isn't liable to come in and surprise us?"

"Him?" the younger one laughed, hitching at his sagging pajamas. "I should say not. He even threatens to have this wing torn down. For it makes him feel like a counterfeiter, he says. But

I've got Ma on my side, though don't imagine that she ever comes here, either, for that matter. It's too spooky, she says."

"Spooky?" old Patsy quickly picked up the word. "You hain't meanin', be you," he kind of let out his hairy neck, "that thar's ghosts here?"

"Ghosts!" pooh-poohed Poppy. "Don't be silly. For there's no such thing as a ghost. A man of your age ought to know that."

"Um. . . . Thar's a funny smell in here. Jest like a tomb."

"That's because we keep it shut up," Art explained.

"But whar's the windows?"

"Windows," Poppy swung in again, "in a *secret room!* Why don't you ask where the public telephone booth is?"

"Wa-al, I'll stick it out to-night. But if I hear anything suspicious you won't kaitch me spendin' a second night here. An' now, Sonny," he turned to the young house owner, whose pajamas persisted in sliding down around his knees, "thar won't be no hard feelin's on my part if you tote out a sandwich or two an' a glass of milk. Fur if a body's goin' to live he's got t' eat."

Instead of one glass of milk Art, like the gallant hero that he was, brought three. And I dare say that the Davidson cook wonders to this

day where her boiled ham and extra loaves of bread went to. Boy, oh, boy, did sandwiches ever taste so good to us as then. After which feast we turned in, Poppy and I in one room and old Patsy in another.

It tickled Art to think that he had us there. And he was crazy to sleep with us. But the fat would be in the fire for fair, as we explained to him, if his folks discovered his empty bed over the sun parlor. So it was agreed that he'd spend the balance of the night in his own room, joining us the first thing in the morning.

"After which," says Poppy, unlacing his shoes, "we'll get things in shape for the big race."

"The race that we're going to win, huh?" the younger one continued to hang around.

"Absolutely, kid, and nothing else but."

"Did I tell you where my motor's hid?"

"No."

"In the fuel house under a pile of kindling."

"Is the door locked?" Poppy inquired quickly.

"Sure thing."

"Say, Art, I forget to tell you something. You know that old man who rents boats."

"Hoenoddle?"

"That's him. He told me to-night that he's just completed a racing boat that we can use if we want to. So to-morrow morning we ought to go over and take a look at it."

"Yah," I put in, thinking of the probable wooden shoes, "and that isn't all we're going to take a look at, either."

Told then about the former gardener's sort of tittering recital in the drive, and various other things, not overlooking my pet theory about the hoof-shaped shoes, Art in turn admitted to us that he knew very little about the mysterious old boatman.

"And did he never try to hire out to your father?" I inquired.

"Not that I know of."

"He builds swell boats," Poppy put in.

"But won't Fuzzer kick if we use the new boat?" Art inquired.

"Let him. What we want to do and what Hoenoddle wants us to do—and does he ever hate that kid!—is to beat him. Nor does it make a particle of difference whether we do it with one boat or another."

"I've got a good boat, Poppy. Dad paid two hundred dollars for it."

"And we may use it, too. But it's to our interests, I think, to look into old Hoenoddle's offer."

"Say, Art," I put in, "you should have been with us to-night when the old gilly stuck his bare arm through the bushes. Br-r-r-r!"

"The tittering," says Poppy thoughtful-like, "is

what gets me. Sometimes I wonder if it was him, after all."

"Who else could it be?"

"Maybe the hoof-marked ghost," the leader laughed, though kind of peculiar-like.

"Yes," I went at him, "and if I said that you'd call me a simpleton."

"I didn't mean it."

"Anyway," I kind of shivered, "quit talking about it whether you mean it or not. For remember where we are."

Art laughed.

"I don't know whether I'd care to sleep here or not."

"Listen, kid," I took him by the ear, "put a safety pin in those pajamas and trot along to bed. For if you're going to talk that way you're as unnecessary here as wheels on a grasshopper."

The hidden rooms, of course, had their own furniture like the rest of the house, so we had a mirror to peek in as we gave our hair a final comb for the night—which, Mother declares, is the only time I ever do comb it—and a chair to squat on while we slid out of our shoes and other truck. Stripped to our B. V. D's. we then rolled into bed, the sheets of which like the rest of the scenery had a musty smell. But I tried not to notice that. Anyway a musty smell wasn't anything to worry

about. As I told Poppy, old Patsy's shoes no doubt smelt a dozen times worse than our sheets. We could hear the old man pottering back and forth in his room as he hung his necktie in one place and his socks in another. Finally he came to the door in his red underwear, reminding us for all the world of Jiggs in the funny pictures.

"An' you're dead sartin," says he kind of worried-like, "that thar's nothin' queer about these rooms?"

"Queer," says Poppy, pinching my hand as we propped ourselves on stiff arms.

"Somehow," the old man spoke slowly, "I have the feelin' that thar's eyes lookin at me. Not the eyes of you b'ys; but eyes I kain't see. Ghosts' eyes fur instance. To tell the truth I'd jest as soon sleep in a tomb." He sniffed the stagnant air. "Dead people," says he throatily.

Poppy, though, scoffed at the idea of ghosts. Poof! How silly. And finally the old man pottered back to his room where, after dousing the light, we heard him crawl wearily into bed.

"Poppy," says I, after a long deep silence in which I found myself peculiarly unable to go to sleep, "this *would* be an awful place to bump into a ghost when you come to think about it."

"Oh, you're as bad as Patsy," he yawned.

I made a grab for his neck.

"POPPY!" I gurgled. "What's that?"

"A little mouse."

"A *little* mouse!" I sweat. "What do the big ones sound like around here—over-fed elephants?"

"Say, untangle yourself, grapevine. I'm no tree."

"Do you know what I'd like to do?" I further contributed to the conversation.

"No. But I know what I'd like to have you do."

"What?" I bit.

"Go to sleep."

"I'd like to dig up that tile floor," I told him. And I meant it, too.

"Well, you'll have all day to-morrow, Sherlock Holmes."

"A wooden corpse," I sort of meditated aloud. "I wonder if it has wooden shoes."

"I'll use a wooden club on your wooden head if you don't dry up."

"Oh, hum," I further flounced around. "And I thought I'd fall asleep as soon as I hit the pillow. Isn't life funny."

"For heaven's sake roost somewhere and quit jumping all over the bed."

"Poppy."

"Well, what now?"

"I just wanted you to know, dearie, that I'm roosting."

"Oh, shut up."

"A lovely place to dream of calla lilies. . . . We can't even bar the doors."

"Well, anyway, old Fuzzer doesn't know where we are."

"I bet he'll guess when he finds that wreck in the ditch."

"Poor old Betsy. She deserves a better interment."

"Meaning which?" says I ignorantly.

"Interment," he then explained, "is what would happen to you if they put you in a grave."

"Dead or alive?" says I cheerfully.

"Dumb-bell."

"What place would you suggest?" I then inquired, wanting to do the "interment" business up right. "The slaughter-house yard?"

"Be your age, Jerry. You're no little kid."

"Anyway," says I, "it wasn't such a bad ditch. I noticed it."

"Rave on."

"Poppy," I then thought of something, "did you ever hear the story of the cat that raised the rat?"

"No."

"Well, that's what old Hoehandle is."

"Talk sense."

"He's the cat. See? And we're the rat. He's trying to let on that he likes us—warning

us, you know, and things like that. But all the time he's waiting for us to get nice and fat so he can eat us."

"Well, I certainly hope he eats you."

"There goes another little mouse," says I, as the left wing of the castle collapsed.

"What is this?—a continuous program?"

"Oh, I feel kind of silly."

"Did you ever feel any other way?"

"Boy, that's a hot one."

"Jerry, for Pete's sake SHUT UP. Do you realize that it's going to three o'clock?"

"Thank heaven," says I, "that it isn't midnight,"

"I'm going to pile in with old Patsy if you don't dry up."

"If you do," I laughed, "I'd advise you to hang his shoes in the ventilator."

"Oh, you're hopeless."

"Yes, and helpless, too. I feel *so* little," I piped, in a thin voice, "and *so* unprotected."

"I wish a ghost would grab you and carry you off."

"One grab," says I dramatic-like, "and I'd be a grease spot."

Old Patsy was stirring again.

"Now what?" muttered Poppy, listening.

"He probably rolled over on his false teeth and got bit."

"Jerry, will you go to sleep if I kiss you good-night?"

"Poppy, I'll tell you the truth. If you were to kiss me I'd never want to wake up."

"In which case," says he grimly, socking me on the snout, "consider yourself kissed."

Which, of course, gave me a fine chance to pretend that I was knocked out—only I kept it up too long. And how beautiful were my dreams now that I had fallen asleep. Coffins climbing totem poles; queer corpses dancing in huge wooden shoes; and chief of all a peculiar tittering ghost.

So the titterer was a ghost after all and not old Hoenoddle, as we had suspected. How interesting. I listened more carefully. It sure was a ghost-like titter, all right.

Poppy always hogs the middle of the bed though he denies it. So it isn't surprising that I fell out. The room was pitch dark. And for a moment or two as I lay on the floor I couldn't get hep to where I was.

Then, in a flash I was wide awake—and this is the part of my story that always gives Mother the shivers. For the tittering that I had heard wasn't a dream at all. It was real. I could still hear it. I got to my feet. And if I live to see a million ghosts I'll never be scareder than I was then. I dove for the bed. For the titterer was

now within a few feet of me. In that pitch-dark room, mind you.

Jumping up, the leader switched on the light. And it is his story that he found nothing in the room. But something had been there. I had heard it. And as further proof old Patsy, awakened by our light which shone into his room, was now screeching bloody-murder.

"It was a ghost," he told us, when we finally got him quieted down. "It came from your room into mine jest as you turned on the light. An' it had a face like a' Injun."

There now! I guess that'll give you something to chew on.

CHAPTER XV

DEDUCTIONS

THERE was some mighty quick work in secret room No. 666, let me tell you, as Poppy and I zipped it here and there merry-go-round fashion grabbing our pants and other scattered truck. For we had no intention of being caught by the awakened house owner and some probable snoopy woman servant in our bare legs. I guess not.

It turned out, though, to our good fortune that the rooms were sound-proof as well as hidden. So we were saved the embarrassment of confronting a searching party either dressed or undressed. And were we ever glad. For you can imagine what an awkward predicament it would have been for us even though we were Art's company.

Old Patsy in the meantime, pottering side-show that he was in that blood-red unionsuit of his—which, mind you, had big holes in it, too!—had gone back to bed with orders to stay there until the reception was over with. And there he was now with the top sheet pulled up to his chin. Asked to further describe the ghost that had scooted from our room into his, seemingly to

escape our light, he could add nothing, he said, to the earlier description.

"An' how do I know it was a' Injun?" he showed impatience under the pressure of our questions. "Because it looked like a' Injun that's why. An' you needn't try to let on, nuther, that I don't know what a' Injun looks like. Fur I do, my youngest brother havin' up an' married one. It was her who socked him over the haid with a potato masher last winter an' knocked the fillin' out of his back teeth. When I say Injun I mean Injun."

An Indian! No wonder Poppy looked queer as he signaled to me to follow him into the adjoining room where we parked ourselves on the edge of the bed.

"This bewilders me, Jerry."

"Yes," says I, "and you aren't the only one who's bewildered. And scared, too. Honest, Poppy," I shoved my shivering apparatus into high gear, "I half believe yet that it was a ghost."

"No, Jerry," he spoke sensibly. "It was that Indian of yours. Though what's he's doing here at this time of night is beyond me. Still, he seems to know all the ins and outs of the place. For he disappeared through a secret door in Patsy's room that we know nothing about. So it may be that this is his hang-out."

"And you think he's the 'ghost' that the housekeeper saw?"

"Beyond a doubt."

"But Art told us that it was a hoof-marked ghost."

"That was just the housekeeper's imagination. Naturally as soon as she saw something her thoughts jumped to the original owner. And to be his ghost, of course, it simply had to have hoof marks. So there you are."

Which was good sense, all right.

So it was fixed in our minds now that what I had heard and what Patsy had seen, also what had thrown the housekeeper into hysterics, wasn't a ghost at all, least of all the dead millionaire's ghost. Nor had we a particle of doubt that it was the same Indian who earlier had broken into the leader's workshop.

It always spoils a mystery, I think, to get the various threads tangled up. So to relieve a possible senseless clutter in your mind of washing machines, carburetors, wooden corpses, outboard motors, Indians, totem poles, hoof-marked ghosts and what not, I think we had better pick up each separate thread of the mystery, with Poppy's help, and see how far we can follow it.

Starting with the dead millionaire we learn, from report, that he was a very queer man. He had strange powers over the birds and other

wild life tenanting his enclosed estate. Even more strange than that was his habit of sleeping in the open both winter and summer. It was known to us now that his mammoth country home contained queer secret rooms and, so we had been told, secret tunnels as well. Just as he had a probable important reason for hiding nights in the woods, sleeping first in one secluded spot and then in another, he also had a corresponding important reason for building these secret rooms. For the work had cost a fortune. And even very wealthy men aren't in the habit of thus throwing their money away.

At one time no doubt the hidden rooms had been the exclusive secret of their builder. And here he had shut himself in as occasions required it, ready to flee for his life through the tunnels in case the *thing* that he feared got beyond the secret connecting door.

Later, as we know, the millionaire had been laid low in the woods though it was generally supposed that his death was an accident. A colt, so the report went, had stepped on him. As though a colt would do that, come to think about it. A silly theory. And because old Hoenoddle seemed to know more about the mysterious affair than anybody else we had suspected him of the crime, figuring that he would have blabbed the secret long ago if his own hands were clean. For

certainly he was gabby enough about other things.

Now, to put a few questions, what did Hoenoddle know? A gardener in the rich man's employ, how had he learned about the secret rooms? What part had he if any in the crime? What had been his object in committing the crime? Or, in other words, what had he gained by the millionaire's death? Further, was there any connection between the killing in the woods and the midnight burial of the wooden corpse? And finally, what was the source of his wide information?

Plainly the proper course here in working out a solution of the mystery was to find out all we could from the boatman, either going to him openly on the supposition that he was our friend as he let on, or by sleuthing him secretly.

And that was that.

Next in line came the Indian who, like the boatman, had inside dope on the secret rooms as his recent visit here proved. Could it be, as Poppy had said, that this was the Indian's hang-out? And had he played "ghost" to keep people away? For the same reason that we had suspected the boatman of complicity in the crime, our suspicions were now directed at the Indian. In fact, after brief consideration, we quite dropped old Hoenoddle as a possible suspect. He knew things, of course. But unless he had crazy spells, as I

had mentioned, he probably wasn't the killer. The Indian was our man.

Granting, though, that the fearful hunted look in the Indian's eyes was the natural result of a troubled conscience, what was his motive in staying here so close to the scene of the crime? Why didn't he skin out and thus make capture impossible? Who was he, anyway? How had he learned the secret of the hidden rooms? Was he the big fear in the millionaire's life? If so, why had he hounded the rich man, finally overtaking and dispatching him? And just as we questioned Hoenoddle's possible gain through the crime, what was his gain? An important point, too, what was liable to happen to Poppy and I if the Indian got hep to the fact that we were sort of prying a hole into his dark secret? Were we liable to meet with the same fearful fate as the millionaire?

Going back to Hoenoddle, did he know about the Indian? And did the Indian know about him? They should know about each other was our conclusion, for they jointly shared the secret of the hidden rooms and probably the secret of the crime as well.

"Do you suppose," says I, as the leader and I further discussed the mystery, old Patsy having dropped asleep, "that the ivory totem pole has anything to do with the Indian's visit?"

"One way to prove that," was the other's quick reply, "is to see if you still have it."

I think he was disappointed when I handed it to him. And then while he pored over it I parked myself in a more comfortable seat.

"There," says I, scrooping the chair along the floor until I faced him. "Now I can see over your shoulder and you can see over mine."

Lifting his eyes he gave me a quizzical look.

"Do you think, Jerry, that the ghost is liable to come back and attempt to grab the totem pole out of my hands?"

"Anything," I told him shortly, "is liable to happen in this house."

"It may be a crazy notion of mine," he then further tugged at the mystery with his wits, "but I half believe that this pocket piece has something to do with the tittering."

Which recalled to my mind the weird sound that had penetrated my dreams, the same sound, I might add, that earlier had crammed us with icicles in the driveway.

"Well," I shivered, "I'm in favor of giving it up to him if you think he'll leave us alone."

"But do we want him to leave us alone, Jerry? Isn't it true that so long as we keep his pocket piece we stand a better chance of solving the mystery?"

I put my own wits to work.

"But if he knows that we have the totem pole and came here to-night to get it why didn't he work quietly instead of tittering?"

There was a short deep silence.

"Jerry, old kid, you sure said a mouthful that time. I can readily imagine that he tittered in the driveway to scare us, hoping that we'd dig out. But that couldn't have been his object to-night if he came here while we were asleep to unload our pockets. Least of all would he have tittered before finishing the job."

Jumping then to the other side of the picture, as you might say, we rehashed all of the circumstances leading up to old Patsy's abduction. An inventor with a long list of failures behind him, and lately a burden on the town, he at last had hit the bull's-eye. Just how he and Lawyer Fuzzer had come together we didn't know. But that was unimportant. Provided with all the money needed to complete his device the inventor never suspected, in signing the lawyer's contract which later had come up missing, that he was a sort of mouse in a cat's paw. Poppy in the meantime had struck up an intimate acquaintance with the inventor. And having examined the carburetor of the new washing-machine motor he asked to borrow it. What he did with it, and what his big hopes were, we already know. According to the bill of sale the carburetor and its drawings were

his. But, of course, that was just a scheme to cut off the lawyer, who, in buying the complete rights on the washing machine at a public auction of his own engineering, thought that he had the world by the tail, though whether it was his intended scheme to resell the patents to some washing-machine company or start a factory of his own remained to be seen.

Then when things seemingly were working their smoothest the old shyster hit the bumps. His "pig" got away from him, thanks to two boys (I almost said two smart boys!). A worse blow, though, would be his discovery of the missing carburetor. Boom! Boom! Boom! The whole earth would rock. But, as Poppy had said, the blustering old bully didn't dare arrest us. For he had too much dirt up his own sleeves to monkey with the law. Which isn't saying, though, that my chum and I weren't liable to find ourselves neck-deep in hot water.

Now, with the two Fuzzers on one end of the scale and the Gnome Towers mystery on the other end we tried to balance one against the other. But we finally gave it up as a bad job. For there was not the slightest connection between the two. Much less than being a hired spy of the Fuzzers', as we had earlier suspected, it was exceedingly doubtful in our minds if the lawyer or his smart

son even knew that there was such a person as the Indian in the neighborhood.

Summing up, we had a layout something like this:

(1) Fuzzer's interest was washing machines; young Fuzzer's interest was outboard motors. Newcomers in the neighborhood, they probably never had heard the weird story of the millionaire's death to say nothing of sharing the secrets that surrounded the dead man's imposing country home with its maze of hidden rooms, tunnels, etc.

(2) There was no evidence to show that either of the Fuzzers had hired the Indian to spy on us. In fact it was our conclusion that they knew nothing about the Indian.

(3) Which proved that the Indian was working alone, though what his object was in breaking into the workshop had yet to be learned.

(4) Spotted by us as the logical killer, the Indian undoubtedly had dispatched his victim with a pair of hoof-shaped shoes. Why the crime had been committed we didn't know.

(5) The killer, after trailing and dispatching his victim, had a peculiar reason for remaining near the scene of the crime, playing ghost, tittering, etc.

(6) The ivory pocket piece might or might not

be of importance to the Indian, supposedly a totem-poler himself; and to much the same point the pocket piece might or might not have something to do with the tittering.

(7) Hoenoddle knew the full story of the crime yet had peculiarly kept silent.

(8) The millionaire's reason for building the secret rooms, tunnels, etc., and his object in sleeping in the woods, likewise the secret of his peculiar powers over the creatures of the woods and his object in this contact with them (unless it was that he depended on them to awaken him in case of danger), was unknown to us.

(9) In all, we were in the direct path of a gigantic mystery probably involving a vast fortune. Powerful, forceful agencies skulked in the black background. And unless we wanted to be run down road-roller fashion, mere boys that we were, it would pay us to watch our "p's" and "q's".

CHAPTER XVI

THE BIG RACE

We were reminded of the coming motor-boat race when Art breezed into our merry little dungeon at four bells as chipper as the awakened robins whose spirited carol came to us faintly through the stone ventilators.

"Well," says Poppy, lifting the younger one's thoughts from the intended early-morning try-out of his enlivened motor, "I guess you're going to lose your star boarder to-day."

"How come?" was the quick inquiry.

"Oh, he saw a ghost last night."

"Ah, ha!" the kid's eyes quickened. "A ghost, huh? What'd I tell you?"

"Of course," added Poppy, "it wasn't a real ghost. But all the arguments in the world wouldn't convince him, superstitious old gilly that he is. So it's useless to think of keeping him here any longer. In fact he wouldn't be asleep now if Jerry and I hadn't promised to stand guard."

Told then that the "ghost" as earlier seen by the housekeeper and so lately by the inventor

was in reality a tittering Indian who seemingly knew all the secrets of the hidden rooms, Art squinted at me curiously.

"Boy, I bet you were scared."

"Me?" I kind of strutted. "I should say not. First I nipped him by the nose. Like this—see? Then I wheeled him around thusly and planted a good swift kick on his rear piazza. It was cruel, kid, I admit. Still," I sort of posed heroically, "I never shirk a duty. And ghost kicking as you know is a part of our code."

"Apple-sauce."

We were reminded of our charge when the dreaming inventor got out of bed and pottered across the room to the dresser where he very cleverly readjusted the various drawer knobs.

"Thar," says he, listening critically. "I bet she'll run now."

But though he turned his big hollow eyes on us as we helped him back to bed he never saw us. The poor old man. His brain was kind of shot. Too much excitement, I guess. Later he begged for a cold cloth to put on his throbbing head. But better than that we doped him up with two of Art's mother's headache powders which not only knocked the stuffing out of his head pains but threw him into a deep dreamless sleep. As I looked down at his wrinkled face, now so still and gray like the poor misguided goat that

started chewing on one end of Mrs. Maloney's garden hose and hadn't the good sense to stop, I had the scared feeling that he, too, had checked in at the side door of the happy hunting ground as the Indians call it. But his hands were warm. I could feel the beat of his pulse, too. So I knew that he was all right.

The rest of Art's family, of course, were sound asleep. Nor were any of the servants likely to bestir themselves, the young house owner told us, before seven-thirty. So we had the big kitchen all to ourselves.

Now that it was daylight my eyes didn't seem quite so sticky. But to further pep us up and sort of make up for our loss of sleep we boiled a pot of strong coffee, putting in three tablespoonfuls to the cup as I remember. Boy, regular old kick-your-mammy coffee. Stepping to the door to spit I very nicely nicked one of the concrete steps. But that was all right. For with a long busy day ahead of us I needed strength.

"The cook won't think anything about the dirty dishes," Art told us, as we got up from the breakfast table where, in addition to the muscle-building coffee, we had murdered a magnificent platterful of bacon and eggs surrounded by toast. "For I always get my own breakfast when I go fishing. . . . Want another banana, Jerry?"

"No, thanks," I loosened my belt. "I'm full."

Averaging about two miles wide and possibly half again as long, Walkers Lake is really a swelling out of the Vermillion River for the sluggish stream runs into the tree-bordered basin at one end and out at the other emptying itself, two miles farther on, after a winding rocky course, into the Illinois River. The early settlers saw nothing valuable in the wooded lake-shore land except as it provided fuel and a convenient watering place for their roaming stock. But to-day, instead of being fenced off into woodland pasture lots practically the whole shore line is built up into beautiful summer homes, one of the show places of the county. There are rustic hotels, too, patronized by rich people, and a sanitarium which you probably will recall with a smile if you have read my "Rose-Colored Cat" book.

About the only truly wild piece of land on the whole lake is a narrow swampy strip called Cedar Point, an eyesore, I might add, to many of the wealthy property owners who want everything done up in fancy flower beds and manicured lawns. A winding graveled road trails through the marsh, a clutter of willows and cat-tails, and it is here at the extreme end of the point on a sort of wooded knoll, the trees of which are mostly red cedars, that the old boatman who plays such a prominent part in my story had built himself a year-around home, the land having been

handed down to him by his father. This is the one place on the lake where you can rent fishing boats, which is another reason why the most exclusive property owners dislike it. For these snobs, to so label them, not overlooking the Fuzzers, would like nothing better than to keep the whole lake to themselves. Mostly, though, I'm going to add, the property owners are willing to share the summer playground with outsiders, providing the visitors don't get hard-boiled and overrun everything. Throughout the school vacation months the lake is dotted with boats of all kinds —sailboats that glide along like huge white gulls, rowboats by the dozens and of as many different colors, a few large cruisers and, of late, "skimmers" powered by high-speed outboard motors.

On a rough day when the waves are high, boats of this latter type, usually not more than twelve feet long and some as light as eighty pounds, will jump clear out of the water. So for safety's sake they're made very broad with a flat "stepped" bottom, which construction, too, helps them to skim over the top of the water, which explains how that name got attached to them.

It takes tremendous power as I understand it to push a heavy speed boat through the water due to the resistance. But a "skimmer," or to use the more technical term, a "planing" boat, will do better than forty miles an hour with a

power plant weighing less than ninety pounds. And is it ever fun to ride in these boats! Oh, baby! But the driver wants to make certain that there are no floating boards or other obstacles in his path. Otherwise—zip!—and he's in the drink. Which explains why all outboard-motor racers wear cork vests.

Years ago the Walkers Lake yacht club used to stage what they called a yearly regatta, a five-mile course having been laid out and marked with red buoys. Then along came the "skimmers" and other fast motor boats to make use of the marked course over which the two speedboat rivals had agreed to run their race, theirs being the two fastest "skimmers" on the lake. And now, as I say, we had gotten up at daybreak to find out in a trial run just how snappy the new "goose-neck" carburetor really was.

At one time Art's boat had been a darb. But it was pretty much battered up now as I saw when I went down to the pier to examine it, the other two having gone to the fuel house to get the motor. I had been told that boats of this type, mere shells that they are with their light planking and even thinner decks, never should be left in the water over night. But here was our chum's expensive boat, to his discredit (and even rich boys have no right to waste stuff that way), rub-

bing the side of the long pier. And when I felt of the under planking which should have been as slippery as a polished hardwood floor, the better to enable the boat to skim over the water, I had the feeling that I was running my hand over coarse sandpaper. Which was bad for us, all right. And I saw now why Poppy had been sort of pinning his hopes on old Hoenoddle's new boat.

"Well," says the leader, when everything had been made ready for the trial spin, "who's going out?"

"Why not all of us?" I inquired eagerly.

"Don't be simple, Jerry. For you ought to know that we can't make speed with a loaded boat."

He and Art then went out turn about each timing the other. But though the boat showed increased speed I saw plainly enough that the leader wasn't satisfied. So finally we all piled into the light craft which, I might add, had developed a bad leak, and headed for Cedar Point, through the trees of which we could trace a spiral of white wood smoke from the boatman's kitchen chimney.

Securing our boat to a rickety pier we took to a winding path that led through the dense cedars. Then as we came within sight of the squatty

cabin with its dingy windows and drooping porch vines we were saluted by a gaunt, long-legged hound.

"Down, Grasshopper," a familiar white head appeared quickly in the kitchen door. "Down, I say. Fur these b'ys is all friends of mine, they be. An' I want you to quit barkin' at 'em. You hear me? Go lay down now."

Friends of his! I wondered if he really meant it.

"Glad to see you, b'ys," he then opened the screen door for us kind of beaming-like. "Jest in time fur breakfast, too."

"Many thanks," says Poppy politely, offering me a hunk of his wabbly chair, "but we've already had our breakfast."

Boy, was this ever a dirty kitchen. Grease spots everywhere. And I wish you could have seen the stinking frying pan on the sway-backed wood stove. Black is no name for it. A lovely place to eat, all right, was my gaggy thought, if one wanted to croak. Still, the old man himself looked healthy enough.

At the conclusion of the meal the greasy dishes were gathered up by the pottering housekeeper and spread around on the back porch where the dog proceeded to lick them clean, after which the red tablecloth was emptied into a crack in the floor—only, of course, not one crumb in fifty

found its way into the crack. But that was all right. For later the dog came in and further mopped up the floor with its long juicy tongue. Bu-lieve me, though, I got back in a jiffy when the four-legged mop tried to lick me.

"One of the biggest conveniences a busy bachelor ever haid," the old man spoke of his dog, rinsing the "washed" dishes in the sink, after which he stacked them in the cluttered cupboard.

"Oof," I gagged in Poppy's ear as we followed the hobbing woodworker into his detached shop where we were shown the new boat. And was it ever a disappointment to us. For it had no shape at all. That is, it looked wholly unlike any boat that I ever had seen. Why, it wasn't even pointed at the front!

"It's my own design," says the old man proudly, fondling the shapeless thing with a loving hand.

It should be added to his credit that the boat was well-built and all that. A good piece of carpenter work. Light, too. But, as I say, it had no lines. It was just a tub. Hence the big disappointment to us.

Art and Poppy were looking at each other sort of wondering, I guess, how they were going to tell the deceived old man the truth about his beloved "scooter." Then as we jointly caught sight of the boat's name, lettered neatly on the

sides, you could have knocked us over with a feather.

The Tittering Totem!

The unusual name would have surprised us at any time. But coming on top of our recent shivery adventures, in which we had vaguely associated the strange tittering with the ivory pocket piece as recorded, we were completely flabbergasted.

Yet how easily was the name explained to us! Mr. Peter Gnome we were told had originated it. Which I dare say was true. But even so that in itself was a mystery. For certainly some peculiar experience of the dead millionaire's—some vague fear, as you might say, or some forceful inner thought—must have prompted the extraordinary name.

And how soon were we to learn added amazing things about this strange totem-pole scientist who, born under one name, had elected to die so mysteriously under another, leaving his dark secrets behind him.

As I say, the new boat looked like a piece of cheese to us. But did we ever get the surprise of our lives when we put it into the lake which, I'll grant, we wouldn't have done if the wise old man hadn't urged us to. Talk about a *scooter*. Greased lightning and nothing else but. Don't

ask me where the odd-looking, square-ended tub got its speed. But it sure was there.

Now that we were sure of victory it would be fun, we agreed, to fool around with young Fuzzer, letting on at first that our new boat was as clumsy as it looked. My, how he'd jeer at us as we wallowed through the water. Letting him win the first heat we'd run neck and neck with him the second, showing him in the final heat what we really could do.

There was more life on the lake now, our noisy motor, I guess, having gotten the cottagers out of bed earlier than usual. Then about eight-thirty young Fuzzer percolated down the path to his own pier where for several minutes he cleverly twiddled the levers and whatnots of his champion speedster, whistling the while (the better to be noticed, of course), after which he put on the usual morning program of playing "ring-around-the-rosy" with the anchored fishing boats.

"You guys are going to catch it from my old man," he then descended on us with flashing eyes.

"Do tell," was Poppy's unconcerned reply.

"You think you're smart helping that old fool. But little good it'll do you as you'll find out before the morning's over. For don't get the idea that you can pull any rope-ladder stuff on us and get away with it. You've just delayed the old

fool's trip to the poorhouse, that's all. For when me and my old man set out to do a thing *we* do it."

"Listen here, kid," Poppy spoke in a voice that was harder than chilled spikes. "Unless you want to take a sudden trip to the hospital I'd advise you to lay off that 'fool' stuff. For it so happens that Mr. Corbin is a particular friend of mine. And I don't propose having you or your old man or any of your crummy gang call my friends fools. Do you get me?"

"Baa-baa-baa-baa-baa!" says the kid contemptuously. "For two cents I'd sock you with my paddle."

"Don't do it," Poppy looked the other squarely in the face. "You might get the surprise of your life."

"Say, Fuzzy," Art then put in. "Lamp my new boat."

And just as we had expected, the enemy, at sight of the tubby looking craft, almost yipped his head off.

"What is it?" he ridiculed. "A cheese box?"

"My other boat sprung a leak," says Art.

"Ho! ho! ho! And you're going to race me in that thing?"

"If it's all right with you."

"All right with me? Ho! ho! ho! Let's start right away."

"Do you really want to?"

"Why not?"

So away they went, Art, of course, trailing behind. And it pleased the lordly young owner of the "Tweet! Tweet!" I imagine, to notice the interest that the neighbors were taking in the race, which in his mind was as good as won.

"Shall we bother to finish it?" says he in that overbearing way of his at the end of the first heat.

Art, though, instead of answering, gravely called Poppy into the boat to tinker the carburetor.

"I couldn't have won that heat if I'd wanted to," he admitted in a worried voice.

Poppy, though, to whom the gizzard and other vital parts of the carburetor were an open book, soon spotted the trouble and set about correcting it.

Here two girls came by in a flashy red canoe.

"Are you boys running a real race?" they inquired curiously.

"Well," says smarty, clever little sheik that he is (in his own mind), "I don't know as you'd call it a real race. For it's too much one-sided. Still," he yawned, giving the girls a wicked wink, "I'm trying to make it as interesting for them as possible."

"Yes," the speaker winked back, "and I bet

you win, too, with that ducky little boat of yours. Isn't it a little dear, Agnes?"

"Perfectly cunning."

"He feeds it canary seed," I put in.

"Aw, shut up," smarty glared at me. "They weren't talking to you."

"Tweet! Tweet!" I posed.

"I think you drive beau-tifully," the main speaker further strutted her stuff. "And I was just wondering— I suppose I shouldn't ask you — But I would love to ride with you."

Oh, mush and soft peanut butter. But young Romeo loved it.

"Stick around until I finish the race," says he grandly, "and I'll give you the fastest ride of your life."

"Oh, goody, goody! Now I do hope you win."

Smarty then got his eyes on the carburetor.

"Say," he inquired quickly, "where'd you get that?"

"Al made it," says Art.

"Al? Al who?"

"Alligator."

But did the girls laugh? Oh, no. For they were looking for a ride.

Poppy then headed the boat into the lake.

"Come on," he cried, "unless you want to forfeit the race."

And away they went, as before. I saw them

pass the first buoy neck and neck. Then Art's kid brother ran down to the pier to tell me that one of us was wanted on the telephone.

Feeling kind of strange here I went around to the kitchen door, thus meeting the cook, who looked at me sour-like as though she suspected the truth about the vanished bacon and eggs.

"Is that you, Poppy?" Mr. Ott inquired over the telephone.

"No. It's Jerry."

"Well, you'll do jest as well. Fur what I've got to report is of int'rest to both of you. . . . Fuzzer's goin' to demonstrate the washin' machine this noon at a special luncheon, invitations havin' bin sent out to all the business men, me included. An' it's his scheme, I hear, to git us to sign up fur stock in his proposed washin'-machine factory."

"Then he hasn't missed the carburetor?"

"Evidently not. But you kin bank on it that he soon will."

I found Poppy on the pier. While out on the lake Art was running rings around the dear little "Tweet! Tweet!" in the final lap of the race.

"Hot dog!" I danced. "Look at that kid go. Oh, baby!"

Certainly, was my added happy thought, old Patsy's fortune was made now.

Here Poppy and I ducked behind a boat house

for old Fuzzer had appeared on the shore literally dumbfounded, I guess, over the outcome of the race. And while we were discussing the telephone call, sort of wondering whether old fatty himself would try to sink his talons into us or call on the law to do the job for him, a swarthy, thick-set man of the deputy-sheriff type came heavily onto the pier.

"I'm looking for a lad named Poppy Ott," he spoke gruffly.

"Just a minute," says Poppy, "and this boy will tell you where he is." Then as Art stopped at the pier, the happiest kid you ever set eyes on, the leader piled into the boat and scooted off, disappearing a few minutes later into the bay beyond Cedar Point.

"Well?" the man looked at me kind of impatient-like.

Taking my cue from Poppy, who had made good his own escape with the valuable carburetor, I pointed to Art.

"He's the guy to ask," I told the sheriff. Then down the lake shore I went lickety-cut.

CHAPTER XVII

A NEW LINK IN THE MYSTERY

THE king of the lake having lost his crown how gall-like must have been his thoughts as he slunk back to his own pier, there to be consoled wheezingly by papa dear who, having discovered the empty bolt holes in his washing-machine engine, had craftily called in a neighboring sheriff to pick us up and fleece us of the needed carburetor now known to be the true object of the hitherto puzzling "bill of sale."

As for the girls in the red canoe, they may still be waiting for the promised "fast" ride so far as I know to the contrary. Certainly they got no ride that morning, fast or otherwise. For the "Tweet! Tweet!" so far as its humiliated young owner was concerned had tweeted its last tweet. He had no interest in the lake now nor in girl passengers either. There are kids of that stamp you know. Unless they can be the drum major at the head of the parade they don't care to be in the procession at all.

Hotfooting it down the lake shore, as I say (and it's Art's laughable story that the aston-

ished sheriff, in following me with his bewildered eyes, held his mouth open so long that he sunburned his tonsils), I could readily imagine the continued disgruntled gab between the two Fuzzers as they compared notes. That meddlesome Poppy Ott! And to think that he had beaten them, so to speak, with their own truck. Boom! Boom! Boom!

The despised "tramp" in the meantime, having proved the invention's real worth and more determined than ever to save it for its rightful owner, had skinned out to hide it. I saw that, all right. And having cleverly escaped the sheriff myself, as described, I was now on my way to join the resourceful leader, figuring, of course, that he'd wait for me at Cedar Point after returning the speed boat to its owner, the latter of whom as you can imagine was tickled pink over the outcome of the race.

"I knowed you'd do it," he waggled, when I tumbled in on him. "Good medicine fur that insolent young smart aleck, too. Nor will his pa's fat pocketbook be of any influence if he asks me to build him a sim'lar boat. No, sir-ee. That hul Fuzzer tribe is an eyesore to me, uppish snobs that they be, an' meanly determined to bust up my boat business."

Poppy it seems, instead of stopping at the boatman's pier as I had expected, had gone on across

the lake. Which kind of puzzled me. And while I was debating in my mind whether to follow in a rowboat or wait here, my attention was drawn to the winding marsh road where old Patsy himself had come into sight, sort of assisted in his pottering passage by the two young totem-pole experts now turned campers.

And were they ever loaded down with truck. Frying pans, kettles, tin plates, a pup tent, a hatchet apiece (only, of course, Rory's was a 'atchet!), an electric lantern, a folding table, a kodak, a mattress and bags of this and bundles of that. In addition there was bedding, also food of all kinds, including fifteen cans of Red's favorite soup, and even a couple of bathing suits —the modest little things! But craziest of all was a huge bag of beans. Sweet sassafras! Twenty pounds of dry beans mind you. You'd think they were headed for the north pole. Yet how like Red Meyers this was, the big numskull.

"Tra-la-la-la-la!" he boomed melodiously, staggering up to the kitchen door and dropping his junk in a heap. "This is the life. Me for the great open spaces where men are men. Wild buffaloes and Gila monsters. . . . Let's eat, Rory."

"We should of 'ired a bloomin' 'orse," complained the other staggering moving van, shedding his truck in pattern.

Then with his freckled mug buried in a sandwich big enough to choke a pop-eyed alligator the leader suddenly remembered something.

"Oh, yes, Jerry. Look who we found in the woods. And he showed us a tunnel, too. Gee. Was it ever nifty. Shove me the mustard, Rory. We're going to explore it some day—no not the mustard, you goof, the *tunnel.* For he says—*git out of my prunes!*—that it runs under the Davidson kid's big house."

Which explains sketchy-like, and in Red's characteristic gab, how the awakened inventor, after dressing, had made his pottering escape from the hidden rooms. Yet as you can imagine his unexpected appearance here was a big surprise to me. And how lucky for him, was my further thought, that he had been picked up by the friendly campers, now headed for Goose Island three miles up the winding river, instead of by the scheming lawyer and his aides.

But the runaway, to so speak of him, had even less intention of staying here as I now suggested than he had of going back to the feared hidden rooms. Too dirty, he whispered to me throatily, taking in his surroundings with disapproving eyes. He'd much prefer, he said, kind of pepped up by the adventurous possibility, to go on up the river with the willing campers. And why not, was my quick decision? Certainly, no safer hid-

ing place could be found for him in the whole state than Goose Island. For the country up there as it had so singularly attracted the millionaire night after night (for it was here that the body had been found) was as wild as an African jungle.

I would have been better satisfied, of course, if Poppy had been there to sort of O. K. my scheme of turning the old inventor over to the campers. But Red was in too much of a hurry to invade the land of "wild buffaloes and Gila monsters" to wait for the leader's probable return. And did I even snicker when poor Rory, in wearily fishing his junk out of the heap at the other's bossy commands, clumsily upset the beans. For the freckled one bellowed so loud that he scattered a pastureful of bulls two miles away.

"I'd hate to eat 'em," I kind of turned up my nose as the dry pellets, having been scooped up dirt and all, were dumped into a pillow case.

Told then that the wormy beans as given to them by a friendly grocer were being taken along for "fox hunting," one of their pet games, I obligingly helped them load their miscellaneous junk into a rented rowboat after which they took seats in the crowded boat themselves, the freckled leader remembering at the last moment that I hadn't been told what their real purpose was in heading up the river on such abbreviated notice.

Rory it seems belonged to a somewhat distinguished family on his mother's side of the house, for not only did one of his American aunts wear manish knickers and write nature books but this wordy relative, having been informed on the younger one's totem-pole activities, had just written him a letter telling about another famous relative by the name of Professor Barton Quills who lived in a lonely forest home three miles west of Goose Island and who, so the letter stated, had an enormous totem pole planted in his front yard.

"And to think," Red gagged up a prune, "that we had a pattern like that within eight miles of us and never even knew it. Can you beat it? But Rory says he never heard of the geezer before."

More totem-pole stuff! The dead millionaire I had learned that morning had peculiarly named one of his boats *The Tittering Totem* which, we were sure, somehow or other connected up with the weird tittering that we had heard as that, in turn, according to our deductions, connected up with the ivory pocket piece, itself a miniature totem pole. And now if Rory's aunt's letter was to be believed—and it was her story that she had seen the big totem pole the preceding summer while on a daring kodaking trip through the country—there was a genuine totem pole in the very woods where the millionaire had so mysteri-

ously met his fate. Totem poles and totem poles! How I wished that Poppy was here to take the lead, the more so when I read the surprising letter itself.

"Professor Quills," the letter stated in part, "is the scientist who, earlier in his career, contributed the valuable collection of Indian crest hats and Shamans' masks to the Field Museum in Chicago. He spent many years among the Tlingit Indians in the Canadian north-west, studying their language and customs, our government later incorporating this information in a book entitled, 'Social Conditions, Beliefs, and Linguistic Relationship of the Tlingit Indians.' I understand, too, that he was largely responsible for the discovery of an ore vein in that section which fabulously enriched the primitive land holders. So it isn't at all surprising that a totem pole, representative of his scientific work, should have been erected at his lonely home in the woods.

"Considering your new interest, Rory, I should think that you and the Meyers boy would enjoy seeing this unusual pole. Even more than serving as a pattern, who knows but what the eccentric owner may magnanimously contribute the trophy to your Boy Scout camp. For certainly it is of no use to him out there in the woods.

"It was my misfortune the day I called there not to find the Professor at home—at least I was

told by the cross-looking Indian servant that the recluse wasn't in. Which, however, didn't deter me from snapping a picture of his odd pole as it peculiarly faces the library windows; also I'm attaching an older picture showing this estimable though distinctly unsociable relative of ours as he was at the time of his retirement into the wilderness more than ten years ago, at which time, I might add, he peculiarly estranged himself from the entire family refusing, even, to exchange letters. Is he so deeply engrossed in the compilation of some vast added scientific data that he has no spare time for small family civilties? I've often wondered. I'll admit, too, that at times I have been mystified."

Having had a good bit of experience in mystery solving, as my stories prove, I saw right off that there was some definite connection between this odd relative of Rory's, a retired totem-pole scientist (or, as one might say, a *hiding* totem-pole scientist), and the dead millionaire. It was from the scientist no doubt that the rich man had acquired his peculiar interest in totem poles. And it was this interest, or some such thing, that had taken the millionaire nightly into the woods where the other man lived, there to be finally struck down.

Of course, I didn't blab to Rory what I actually

suspected. For the scientist was his second-cousin or something. And it isn't nice to run down another's relations even second-cousins. But I was dead sure now in my own mind that the scientist, quite as much as his Indian servant, was mixed up in the weird case. A scheming pair, working to peculiar hidden ends. Nor was there a particle of doubt that our Indian, to so speak of him, was the scientist's servant. For the ivory pocket piece as dropped in Poppy's alley was an exact copy of the original totem pole in the scientist's yard. One look at the picture told me that.

Rory said I could keep the important picture to show Poppy. So I shoved it into my pocket after which the campers pulled out for Goose Island where, as I say, they planned to pitch camp, later hiking to the house in the woods or, as I now thought of it, the Hidden House.

A hidden house and hidden rooms! Plainly, they had a common secret. And that secret was an open book to the Indian servant who undoubtedly had been brought here by the scientist, himself a recluse. I thought, too, and peculiarly, of the appearance of the rich man in the neighborhood at about the same time. One man had built a hidden house. The other man had built a vast house with hidden rooms. Both men were interested in totem poles one apparently having

picked up that interest from the other. Then the wealthier of the two had been put out of the way.

Surely, was my sort of scattered conviction, strange disclosures lay ahead of us.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BOATMAN'S STRANGE COLLAPSE

INSTEAD of scooting directly across the lake as I had suspected, Poppy had gone on up the river, the better to drift home with the current. Which further proves his good sense. So, when he finally landed at the pier, after considerable hard paddling, the carburetor having been jiggled loose from the motor and hidden in a hollow oak two miles away, I was saved the job of telling him about the campers and their peculiar object in heading up the river, for he already had met and talked with them including the runaway himself.

"Things are getting hot, huh?" says he, as we lugged the motor to the house for safe-keeping, later following with the speed boat which was wiped dry, inside and out, its proud owner, of course, wanting to keep it looking as shiny as possible until he had found a buyer for it.

This work done I drew the leader aside.

"Now," says I kind of eager-like, "let's go over here by ourselves. For I've got things to

tell you about that old geezer up the river that you know nothing about."

The other, I guess, read stuff in my face.

"Don't tell me, Jerry," says he kind of incredulous-like, "that he's mixed up in the crime, too."

"Kid," says I impressively, anxious to dish out my very latest and as you might say my most eloquent theory, "even more than being mixed up in it he's the bird who planned it."

"Aw, go on."

"Look at that," I flashed the totem-pole picture on him.

After which as you can imagine there was considerable of a silence.

"Well, anyway," he gave a queer laugh, which in itself showed how tangled up his wits were, "we know where the Indian got the pattern for his pocket piece."

"Yes," says I, "and if you had read Rory's letter as carefully as I did, as it tells about the big totem pole, you'd know, further, that the Indian belongs up there. He's the old man's servant."

"And you really think, Jerry," the other searched my face, plainly unwilling to trust to his own theories, "that it was the old man himself who planned the crime?"

"Beyond a doubt," I spoke with conviction,

experienced Juvenile Jupiter Detective that I was. "The Indian is just a tool."

The mystery we agreed was one of peculiar contradictions. And least of all could we figure out why the millionaire had gone to such great expense to provide himself with protecting hidden rooms only to turn his back on these rooms at nightfall, wandering off into the forest. We knew that he was interested in totem poles. And we suspected that he had picked up this interest from the scientist. Which would further suggest that the two men were the best of friends. Moreover, to that point, they had come into the neighborhood at the same time. Yet if my theory was correct the scientist was the one who had planned the crime. And I really believed it, too.

It was indeed a bewildering, contradictory tangle. And with the hope of getting straightened out we separately went in search of the old boatman.

Earlier, as you know, we had tried to hang the crime on the former gardner, and though we had given up that theory, due to later developments, crediting the Indian instead (known to be a clever ivory carver) with the ownership of the probable hoof-shaped wooden shoes, I was still eager to search the boatman's house. For admittedly he had inside dope on the crime. So what more probable, was my sensible conclusion, than

that other peculiar clews of more or less importance were tucked away in odd corners of his cluttered home?

Yet how guilty I felt as I tiptoed into the deserted house, baked in the heat of the blazing morning sun, its owner it seems having trailed off into the adjacent swamp on some pretext or other. As a matter of fact this was the first time that my detective responsibilities had led me into a job of this kind. And if I must tell you the truth I didn't like it for two cents. For it was plain snooping. And I had been taught at home that snoops and snakes belong in the same class.

But duty is duty. So, working quickly, hopeful that whatever clews I uncovered would favor the old gentleman, I ransacked the house from top to bottom. Particularly did I sleuth the dark closets and cluttered bureau drawers. And it was in one of these, under an old Bible, that I found a faded picture matching the one that Rory's aunt had sent him. Not a picture of the totem pole, but a photograph of the scientist himself.

A deep, mysterious man, all right, was my conclusion, as I studied the picture by the light of an upstairs window. I noticed, too, how carefully his eyes had avoided the camera. For pictured eyes, as he very well knew, are windows

projecting into one's innermost soul. A miser's eyes reflect greed. A killer's eyes reflect blood. Smiles and similar expressions very often are masks, as was this noticeable cultured expression on the pictured face. But I wasn't fooled. For I saw behind the studious-like mask, even though I was denied a look into the telltale eyes themselves.

Had this mask, I wondered, been a lifetime in the making? Or had some development of later years switched him into evil paths? Scientists usually live single-purpose lives putting their chosen work ahead of everything else. But he, queerly, after marked achievement in his particular field, had suddenly given up this work in favor of complete mysterious seclusion. At least the relatives concerned were mystified by his peculiar retirement. And how keenly would they feel his disgrace, was my further thought, when it became known that his probable sole purpose in burying himself in the forest was to peculiarly attract and dispatch another man.

Pocketing the picture I tiptoed down the stairs at the foot of which I got the shock of my life. For there, waiting for me on his crooked cane, was old Hoenoddle himself. Gee. Keyed-up anyway, as I say, I almost went down for the count.

"Um . . ." scowled the indignant house

owner. "Will you tell me, young feller, what business you've got snoopin' in my bureau drawers?"

So he had heard me! Peculiarly, though, instead of being scared of him I wanted to laugh. A kind of crazy laugh. For he sure had caught me slick, all right. And me a professional detective mind you. All puffed up over my own ability, too. That was the funny part.

"I'd hate to think," he followed up, giving me the benefit of the doubt, "that you were lookin' fur money."

"And would it mean anything to you," I spoke sort of daring-like, "if I were to tell you that I was searching for a pair of wooden shoes?"

"Heh?" he stared. "What kind of shoes did you say?"

"Hoof-shaped wooden shoes," I elaborated.

"Um . . . " his scowl deepened. "I still don't know what you're talkin' about."

"You should," was my added daring remark, "if you knew the truth about the hoof marks on the dead man's chest as you claim."

Which kind of threw him into a panic.

"I never claimed that," he screeched, sort of going to pieces. "No, I never. Fur heow could an ol' man like I be know things that the police don't know? I don't, I tell you. I *don't*. An' I want you to git out of here, too. Go now," he

pointed to the door with his trembling cane. "Go, I say. An' don't you never come back, nuther."

Relieved, of course, to get out of the mess so easily, and admittedly a bit shaken now as any boy would have been who looked into those wild hunted eyes, I started for the door but stopped, kind of paralyzed-like, when the old man, after screeching bloody-murder, fainted in a heap on the kitchen floor.

Poppy it seems had been waiting for me in the workshop. But he lit out from there on the tear when he heard the ear-splitting commotion in the kitchen.

"What happened, Jerry?" he bent over the crumpled shrunken form following his tumbling entrance into the room.

"Gosh," I shivered, trying to shake the icicles out of my backbone. "Don't ask me."

Given sharp orders then to get a basin of cold water and, if possible, some camphor, I further helped the capable leader lift the limp form onto a couch.

"Did—did you hear it?" were the first words spoken by the old man, sort of hollow-like, upon his recovery. And bending over him, one with a camphor bottle and the other with a cold cloth, we were struck by the combined fear in his shaky voice and sunken eyes.

Again the leader turned to me for an explana-

tion. And in better control of my wits now I told him about my detection by the house owner at the foot of the stairs and the other circumstances leading up to the unexpected and, to me, unexplainable collapse.

"What was it that you heard, Mr. Hoenoddle?" Poppy then bent over the form on the couch, thinking, I dare say, of possible prowling spooks. "Tell us, and maybe we can help you."

"It was the goat-man. I've heerd him before, though lucky fur me I've never seed him. Fur if I haid I wouldn't be here to-day to tell about it."

The goat-man! We were staring at him now. And peculiarly, too, I found myself thinking of hoof prints. For goats, of course, had hoofs the same as colts.

But what could he mean by a *goat-man?* Certainly, not a man with goat's feet. For that was impossible. I had the sort of scattered conviction, though, that we were going to hear surprising things.

"I—I told you a lie, Jerry," the helpless old man then spoke directly to me. "I do know what killed Peter Gnome. But I vowed I'd never tell it to a livin' soul. Fur I feared the consequences."

"Was it the Indian?" I inquired eagerly.

"Indian?" the weary eyes sought mine sort of wondering-like. "What Indian?"

Poppy pinched my hand.

"You should know by this time, Mr. Hoenoddle, that Jerry's liable to say anything. So don't pay any attention to him. Please raise up and let me put this pillow under you. There. Isn't that more comfortable?"

The tired eyes were full of appreciation.

"You're a good b'y, Poppy. An' I see now that I kin trust you with my secret. It was easy to keep it at first. Yes. I felt kind of big about it, too—me knowin' the truth about the millionaire's death, as I say, an' everybody else bein' fooled, the police included. But lately the secret has bin workin' on me. An' I've made mention of it in places whar I never intended to. I've even wondered at times if my mind wasn't sort of breakin' down under the strain."

"I think it will do you good, Mr. Hoenoddle, to tell us about it," says Poppy sensibly. "And who knows," he added, in that bright-eyed way of his, wonderful kid that he is, "but what we'll be able to fix you up as slick as a bug in a rug."

And now comes the amazing story itself.

CHAPTER XIX

AN AMAZING DISCLOSURE

"It's a strange story," the old man began, a far-away look in his eyes as his thoughts ran down the chain of years to the events preceding the unusual crime. "Not many people would believe it. Sartinly," the shaggy gray head bobbed emphatic-like, "I took no stock in it at first. An' I was doubly suspicious of Mr. Gnome fur tellin' it to me. He did it to warn me, he said—him sittin' on one side of the big library table an' me on the t'other side. But somehow I couldn't git the notion out of my head that he was workin' to his own peculiar int'rests, queer man that he was an' a puzzle to everybody who come in contact with him."

"Did you know him before he came here?" Poppy then inquired, to sort of help the other along.

"Nope. Nor do I know whar he come from, nuther. That was one of his many secrets."

"You never heard then," came the added inquiry, the leader it seems having been mulling over some theories of his own, "that he had

spent considerable time up in Alaska where the Indians carve totem poles?"

"Nope."

"You know, though, that he was interested in totem poles."

"Yep."

"And did he ever tell you why he named his boat *The Tittering Totem?*"

"Nope."

"That's an odd name, Mr. Hoenoddle," Poppy sought to draw the other out.

"So odd in fact," the old man agreed, wagging solemnly, "that I made use of it myself as you know."

"Jerry and I wondered if the name had any particular significance to you."

"Nope. The other speed boats, I saw, had odd names. An' I wanted my boat to have an odd name, too."

"How long did the millionaire live here before he was killed?"

"Um . . . About three years as I recall."

"And during all that time he slept in the woods?"

"Yep," the shaggy head bobbed again, only more vigorous-like this time, as though the younger one's question had stirred up exciting recollections. "An' that's the first thing about him that set me to wonderin'. Why, says I, sort

of cross-questionin' myself—an' mysteries I might say here always did int'rest me profoundly—why, says I, to repeat, should a man with fifty comfortable beds at his command do a crazy thing like that? Then by watchin' him I found out other queer things, too. He haid secret doors in the walls. An' behind them doors I learned was hidden rooms."

"Old Patsy told us a peculiar story about you burying a wooden corpse in one of these hidden rooms," I spoke up, curious to learn what effect the words would have on him.

"I swan! Did he tell you that? The ol' gossip. Wa-al, we're all entitled to our own individual hobbies, I reckon. An' mine in them days, strange as it may seem to you, was crimes."

"Yes," I nodded. "We heard about that, too, as you probably know if you used your ears last night in the driveway."

"Wa-al," he smiled peculiarly, "it's a fact, b'ys, as you suspected, I do know what killed Peter Gnome. But I haid nothin' to do with the killin' itself. His death was the natural consequence, as you might say, of his own injudicious acts. Jest as small b'ys are liable to git burned when they stick their meddlesome fingers into hot jam pots so also are grown-up people liable to get burned if they exceed the bounds of natural curi-

osity—only in Mr. Gnome's tragic case *he* got killed."

"Yes," Poppy filled in the gap, to hurry the story along.

"As I say, the man mystified me. Them secret rooms; his queer habit of sleepin' in the woods; his familiarity with the birds an' sech. Why, he even talked to the flowers, too. I heerd him. An' one time I followed him into the woods."

"Was that the night of his death?" I put in excitedly.

"Oh, no. This was in the daytime. As a matter of fact no one ever was able to follow him at night, though how many tried it, besides myself, I kain't say."

"But we were told," I kind of pinned him down, "that you led the searching party directly to the spot where the body lay."

"An' what you heerd," he nodded gravely, "is precisely correct. Fur I did that very thing, followin' a night, as you may have heerd, too, of terrific summer storms. Sech a glare of lightnin' an' sech a downpour I never hope to see ag'in if I live to be a thousand years old. It was as though the hul combined furies of the universe haid been set loose, each told to do its killin' in its own preferred way. Yet the mornin' was born

with a quietness that seemed almost like a benediction. An' somehow I knew then that the master was daid. So we set out to find him in the wreckage of the storm. An' thar he lay in the selfsame spot whar, earlier, I haid overheerd him talkin' to the trees an' squirrels."

"And did the trees answer him?" Poppy put in the curious question.

"Not so fur as I could hear. But that evenin' before he started off, only to disappear as usual at the edge of the forest, he called me into his library an' told me that the trees an' squirrels haid bin tellin' him queer things about me. I was spyin' on him, they said. An' he asked me what my object was.

"Wa-al, if you must know the truth I tried to lie out of it, afeered, of course, that I'd lose my job. I haidn't followed him on purpose, I said. It jest happened that I haid seed him in the woods. An' then is when he told me the truth about hisself. . . . Ever hear of a man with goat's feet?"

"No," says Poppy.

"Wa-al, as I understand it he hais somethin' to do with nature—sort of bosses the trees an' sech. They kin see him, bein' a part of nature. But human beings kain't see him. He has horns, too, an' goat's whiskers."

As you can imagine I had been on needles and

pins to hear more about the mentioned "goat-man." But I certainly hadn't expected to hear that the strange creature also had horns and goat's whiskers.

At the old man's request I then brought him a well-worn book of Grecian fables from which he pointed out a particular picture. Later I borrowed the book and had the picture copied. Here it is:

"That's him," the old man pointed with a trembling finger. "His name is Pan—see? An' it was him who killed the millionaire."

I had expected amazing disclosures. I was even prepared now to hear about a man with real goat's feet—some queer unleashed misshapen creature of the scientist's let us say. But a *fairy!* Either the old man was crazy, I concluded, peculiarly disappointed, or he had let his imagination run away with him.

"Yes," he added, when we pointed out to him that the stories in the book as they featured different divinities were purely imaginary, "I know that. Which is the purticular reason why I've kept shet all these years. Fur I knowed if I told my story nobody'd believe me. An' I git enough ridicule heaped on me as 'tis. Moreover, I was afeered if I told on the goat-man that he'd lay fur me, too, to which pi'nt, as I say, I've heerd his clatterin' hoofs more'n once."

Clattering hoofs! I recalled now that the dog had rolled a tin can or something across the porch. But who except a fear-ridden old man, his nerves sharpened by years of peculiar watching and listening, would have read cause for alarm in such a commonplace commotion as that?

It might be well for me to state here that neither Poppy nor I took the boatman seriously as the queer story was then further unraveled for us. As though a fairy could actually commit a crime! Still, the story, however unbelievable, left us wondering. For it supplied a supposedly plausible reason for many things that had puzzled us, including the millionaire's purpose in sleeping in the open and his unusual contact with the birds and squirrels.

"As I say," the story was resumed, "the millionaire, in makin' friends with the birds an' trees, haid pried too deeply into nature's hidden se-

crets. He called hisself a part of nature, meanin' that he was jest the same as the trees. Accordin' to what he told me that night in the library the thing that he was in search of was immortality. It was to talk with the trees that he spent hours in the forest. An' like the trees themselves of which he claimed to be a part, as I say, he slept outdoors. Wedgin' hisself farther an' farther into nature's innermost secrets, an' tryin' to develop the same kind of eyes an' ears that the trees haid, he finally heerd the actual music of Pan, the god of nature, as he played on his pipes. The music at first was a sort of whisper. Then as the weeks passed—an' this was the story he told me that night—the music steadily grew louder.

"Soon now, he said, he'd see the piper hisself, an' then would come one of two things: immortality or death. Which I thought was a lot of flapdoodle. The forest, he told me, was a place of queer secrets. An' I haid best keep away from thar. I kin still hear his concluding words: 'Don't be a curious fool like me, Hoenoddle. For curiosity such as mine leads only to discontentment. Ours is a preordained place in the general scheme of the universe. And we should be content with this allotted place and the mysteries pertaining to it. But I have gone too far in my quest for the unusual to turn back. My ears

have become attuned to the voices of nature. And it is the promise of the trees that I shall be told the prime secret of all. Listen, Hoenoddle! Can't you, too, hear them as they call to me through the open window? Come! Come! Thus do they always call to me at nightfall as a mother calls to her children. I am one of them. And who knows but what to-night I may learn the supreme secret.'

"Wa-al, as you know, he was found daid, the prints on his chest givin' rise to the belief that he haid bin stepped on by a colt. But the instant I seed them prints I knew the truth, however bewilderin' it was to me. Much less than bein' crazy as I haid suspected, or wantin' to purposely mislead me fur certain selfish reasons of his own, he indeed haid heerd things in the woods. The music, I mean. He haid heerd too much in fact. So to git rid of him, meddler that he was, the goat-man killed him."

"But how does this explain the secret rooms?" Poppy finally broke the silence that followed the story's conclusion, hopeful of picking up some information of real value to us.

"Them rooms was jest a queer notion of his'n, I reckon."

"Did he ever go there and shut himself in as though he was afraid of something?"

"Not that I know of."

The leader then told what *he* thought. And bu-lieve me, as the saying is, it was a mouthful.

"Mr. Gnome knew that you were spying on him, Mr. Hoenoddle. And he was afraid that you'd find out too much. So, to protect his secrets and sort of plausibly explain his conduct, he made up that story of the goat-man. No, please don't interrupt. For I know what you're going to say. *You* think that the story is true. But I don't. I can't, however much the man's death would seem to prove it. I believe he knew of the peril hanging over him and shaped his story accordingly. But the thing he feared wasn't a man with goat's whiskers. No, indeed. As a sort of wild guess I'm going to venture the assertion that it's a man in a stovepipe hat; a man with a Sphinx-like face; a scientist in fact, supposedly a friend who, having accomplished his dark ends, still hides in the nearby forest behind his own carved effigy."

Gee-miny crickets! So the totem-pole geezer was the scientist himself. Poppy at sight of the picture had caught on as quick as scat. Which explains his earlier peculiar bewilderment.

And how about *me,* clever little detective that I was supposed to be? Asleep at the switch and nothing else but. Gosh! Did I ever feel cheap.

Then I was thrown into a fever of excitement, as you might say, when the old boatman denied

ever having seen or heard of the retired scientist.

Which, as I told him outright, was a bald-faced lie.

"Um . . ." says he, when I flashed the picture on him that I had found in his own bureau drawer, proof enough to me that he knew the scientist. "Jest hand me my specs."

It seemed to me that he was hours getting the picture in proper focus.

"An' who did you say this is?" he inquired at last.

"Professor Barton Quills."

"Nope," came slowly, the gray head waggling the while. "You're wrong. This is a picture of Mr. Gnome hisself—the man I've jest bin talkin' about."

Astounded, we realized more than ever that the solution of the weird mystery lay up the river in the home of the big totem pole.

Was Professor Quills and Peter Gnome one and the same man? If so, then both were dead. Peculiarly, though, some one who claimed to be the scientist now occupied the latter's hidden house.

Who was it?

CHAPTER XX

ON TO THE RESCUE!

ONE of the spookiest books I ever read was *Dr. Jekyl and Mr. Hyde,* the strange story of a doctor who, aided by drugs, developed a dual personality. Boy, did I ever shiver in my keds when old Hyde, the evil one of the pair, was strutting his cold-blooded stuff. It was a good thing for the world, I want to tell you, that he died. Yet how terrible, in a way, that Dr. Jekyl, unfortunate victim that he was of his own unwise experiments and a good man at heart, had to go, too.

And now it would seem from the mystery's latest developments that Poppy and I were tangled up in much the same kind of a case, the central figure of which, known to the world by day under an assumed name and by night under his true name had been peculiarly laid low. And strangest of all some one of unknown identity was carrying on the pretense that the scientist himself was still frisking around in his hidden home in the forest.

Of course, we had no proof as yet that the

millionaire had spent his nights in the other house. But that struck us as being a far more sensible theory than that he had slept in the woods as he had let on to his servants. For as Poppy had said in the conclusion of the preceding chapter we didn't swallow that story of the goat-man. I should hope not. The millionaire, fearing for the safety of his secrets, had made up the story to keep the snoopy gardener out of the woods.

And Rory's aunt had wondered why the scientist never wrote to her any more. She little dreamed, of course, that her relative was dead.

We could see now why the informed Indian servant in stopping her at the front door had told her that the "master" wasn't at home. The impersonator didn't dare to face her, any more than he dared to write letters to her. Gosh! And what would happen if Rory insisted kid-like on going inside?

Plainly the sooner we got up there the better. So, hurriedly setting out a lunch for the feeble old boatman and telling him the while to keep a grip on his frazzled nerves as best he could until we got back, at which time we'd have proof that the goat-man was a myth, thus forever downing the fear of his life, we grabbed a bite ourselves, it now being noon, and lit out in a borrowed rowboat.

"Jerry," says the leader, as he tugged manfully at the oars, determined to reach the campers as soon as possible the better to make sure of their safety, "what is a totem pole, anyway?"

"A sort of family monument as I understand it."

"I thought so," he spoke shortly.

And that's all he did say.

"Well?" I finally hinted in growing uneasiness.

"Don't you see the purpose of that big pole up there in the woods?" he then raised his eyes to mine, still tugging at the oars. "It's a tombstone, put there by its carver in memory of the dead scientist himself. That's why he sits on top, all dressed up in his Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes, high hat included. It's his pole."

"And you think the Indian carved it?" my own mind was peculiarly busy.

"Indeed I do."

"But what was his idea in ringing in a lot of whales and other junk?"

"Search me."

"That's regular Indian stuff."

"I know it."

Now, of course, we knew the truth about the millionaire's interest in totem poles (which to us was the most convincing proof of all that he was the scientist, himself). That part of the mystery

was cleared up. Yet it is to be acknowledged that other "whys" seeking attention jumped at us more persistently than ever.

Why, for instance, had the scientist in suddenly throwing up his career sought seclusion in the forest? Why had he framed up the dual-life business? Peculiarly, too, why had he included the word "tittering" in the name of his boat? *The Tittering Totem!* Had the weird tittering voice earlier haunted the hidden rooms? And had their owner been mystified? Oddly, though, he had tied up the tittering with a definite object. A totem pole. Or, in short, a tittering totem. Such was the name that he had given his boat. So it would seem that he knew the truth about the tittering. And why shouldn't he, come to think of it? For the Indian was his own servant. But most puzzling of all, where did the "totem" part come in?

Moreover, what was the source of the scientist's great wealth as he had dished it out under an assumed name? Was this the keynote of the mystery? And why had he wasted his gab on the trees and flowers? More comprehensive to us was his treatment of the friendly birds and squirrels. Yet, in a way, this was odd, too, especially when taken in conjunction with the tree stuff. It all ran to the same point seemingly.

And there were the hidden rooms. What, for

instance, had been his object in building them? Were they, as we had suspected, a hiding place? And had he constantly lived in the shadow of a great known peril—a *tittering* peril let us say? If so, why hadn't he skinned out? Why had he stuck around to be laid low so mysteriously? And, in final, who had put on the wooden-shoe act? The Indian? Or the unknown impersonator?

We were in a deep gorge now the irregular rocky walls of which, worn into fantastic shapes by the action of the water, towered high above our heads. It was here, the leader pointed out to me, that the carburetor had been put away in a hollow tree. But he spoke briefly of the invention and our probable later promotion work. For of far more importance now was our trip to Goose Island and our later intended trip, in company with Red and Rory, to the sinister hidden house itself. The home of the man-eating ogre as you might say. Br-r-r-r!

We passed Bailey Falls on our right, the show place of the neighborhood in high water, which is as far inland as the lake motor boats dare penetrate. For just beyond the falls with its own Cave of the Winds, an exciting place to crawl into let me tell you when the big show is on, we struck a rapids through the foam-lashed bowlders of which we had to pull our boat, a task

that I mention briefly but which took the better part of an hour. And did we ever sweat! Oh, baby!

Getting back to the oar stuff I promptly took over this job, not wanting the willing leader to wear himself out, and after a bit we found ourselves in a flatter country, sort of shut in on both sides by towering trees. And how peculiar were my thoughts now as I took in the changing scenery. For it was here to the right, as I very well knew, that we were to run the mystery to earth, ogre and all.

Rounding a bend in the now sluggish stream, and sort of accompanied in our sweating passage by countless winged creatures from the adjacent forest the giant trees of which never had felt the destructive touch of a woodsman's axe—trees, I might add, around whose great limbs grew snake-like vines as thick as a boy's leg—we came within sight of Goose Island, itself a tangle of trees and cluttering foliage.

Particularly would a wild unfrequented place like this appeal to a Boy Scout. And so often had Red Meyers mentioned the place to me, big goose that he is himself in more ways than one, that I now wondered, as we neared it, if it hadn't been named after him. Still, I like that kid with all of his crazy ways. He has made a place for

himself in my life. And I could think of nothing worse than losing him.

The pup tent had been set up on a grassy knoll at the lower end of the island. And there propped against a tree, plainly fast asleep, was old Patsy. But our lusty salutation quickly awakened him. And scrambling to his feet he hurried down to the water's edge to meet us fearing, I guess, that we had brought him bad news.

"Where's Red and Rory?" Poppy quickly made inquiry, as he stepped ashore.

"Um . . . I kain't say fur sartin. Fur I've bin asleep. But I calc'late they're foolin' around somewhar."

Further calling to the campers to let them know that they had company we presently caught sight of Rory coming on the run.

"'Ot-dog?" says he, plainly tickled to see us. "Hi kind of 'ad a 'unch you'd find hit and bring hit up to us."

"What?" says Poppy.

"Red's bag of prunes. We lost hit—only, of course, 'e blamed me. And it'll be 'is story when 'e sees you that all 'e 'ad for dinner was a can of soup, six sandwiches (or was hit sixteen?), five cookies, 'alf a pie, three pieces of kyke, some baked beans and—"

"The poor kid," put in Poppy sympathetically.

"I bet he's half starved. And gladly would I separate myself from the prune bag if I had it. But it wasn't prunes that brought us up here."

Told then that his mysterious totem-pole relative was dead, the smaller one at first looked stunned and then, getting the complete story, he went off by himself sort of sober-like to think it over.

"If this bally geezer at the 'idden 'ouse is a killer," he finally joined us in back of the tent where we were merrily exploring the freckled one's extensive grub supply, the hard row having pepped up our own appetites, "we ought to capture 'im and turn 'im over to the law."

"Atta-boy," applauded Poppy over the roof of a fat sandwich, as he loved the smaller one with his eyes. "You'll do, kid."

"And the bloomin' totem pole," was the young relative's further hopeful thought. "What becomes of that?"

"Say the word," grinned Poppy, "and we'll grab it on the fly and float it down the river for you."

" 'Ot-dog!" Rory's eyes danced. "If only we dared, 'uh?"

In explanation of Red's continued absence we were told then that a "fox hunting" game was in progress, Rory it seems, as the "fox," having

"WE CAME WITHIN SIGHT OF GOOSE ISLAND."

Poppy Ott and the Tittering Totem. *Page 212*

made a circuitous tour of the island leaving behind him a trail of white beans.

"Red'll be sore, Hi suppose, because Hi didn't wait for 'im in my 'lair.' For that's the way we play the game, the 'fox' leading and the ''unter' following. But Hi 'urried back when Hi 'eard you guys, figuring that 'e'd do the same."

Impatient to get started for the 'idden 'ouse (excuse me, I mean the hidden house!), the better to wind up the mystery, we yipped for Red to come in, telling him that the game was over. But he either was laying out on us in fun, or something had happened to him, for he neither came nor signaled to us. And kind of worried now we went in search of him.

"Red," we shouted, meandering up one side of the small island and down the other. "Hey, Red. Answer us." But plainly he wasn't here. Either he had gone off in the boat of his own accord, making no effort to follow Rory's trail, or something had spirited him away.

Getting into the remaining boat we then rowed to the west shore where, after considerable search, we found the other rowboat hidden in the reeds. Here, too, we found a jumble of footprints and, more important, the beginning of a bean trail.

It was our sort of stunned conclusion now that

poor Red, loaded with beans himself, never had had a chance to follow his chum's trail, but had been carried off by the Indian, though how the latter had been able to get the prisoner away without awakening old Patsy was an added mystery to us. It was to be hoped, though, that poor Red hadn't been knocked cuckoo. And to my everlasting shame I had called him a goose!

Considering that the captive had laid the bean trail on the sly (clever kid that he was to think of it) and probably had been made to stumble along with his hands tied loosely behind his back, he certainly had done a thorough job of it. Which doesn't mean, though, that everything was pie and ice cream for us. I guess not. At times we were completely lost, the hungry birds, I guess, having made a feast of the beans ahead of us. Then, too, we were cut off by thorny blackberry thickets, dense gooseberry patches, grapevine tangles and a dozen other crazy obstructions. And this was Illinois! More like Brazil, was my conclusion, as I wearily dragged myself along.

The forest seemingly was without end. Nor did we run across anything in the way of a road to thus simplify our passage. Then to our hard luck the prisoner ran out of beans, the trail coming abruptly to an end. And there we were.

Well, the only thing to do, Poppy said, sick over the delay, was to go back and then lay a

direct westerly course from the river. As it was we had no idea whether we were traveling north or south. And were we ever tired. Oh, mister man. But we kept on, determined to save old Red-head or die in the attempt.

Yes, we sweat and fret and tumbled and tore. We fought mosquitoes and bumblebees. We spraddled fallen trees, wallowed through mud holes and crawled through briery thickets. We were hung up by grapevines, tripped up by surface roots and banged up by everything in general. The sun baked us, the mud caked us and the briers scraped us. All this we did for our beloved and imperiled pal. And willing were we to do more. Our hearts were tortured, too, as we thought of what this delay might cost him. Poor Red! I could almost see the hearse backing up to his front door. And later on, when the sharp edge of her grief had worn off, his mother undoubtedly would come over to my house and offer me his jigsaw and other junk. We'd both be choked up. And how tenderly I'd kiss the little seat of the jigsaw and put it away in the attic.

It was a picture to bring tears. And later on when I found out the truth about that blamed bean trail I wanted to knock his block off. Gosh! If he wouldn't make a horse gag.

Throughout the day we had heard the occasional distant rumble of thunder. And now in the

late afternoon a gathering storm sent the forest creatures scurrying to cover. The sky got as black as ink. The lightning flashed. And the trees groaned and moaned. *Talking,* I suppose, is what the millionaire would have called it.

Then as though to prove the truth of that crazy story we heard a peculiar far-away sound. Was it the rain on the leaves? Or was it real music? Gosh all Friday! However much I had discredited the story of the goat man. I don't mind telling you now that I was scared stiff. For it *was* music. Moreover, as mentioned in the early part of my book, Rory declared, as we huddled under the trees to escape the downpour, that he saw something peeking at us through the bushes.

Br-r-r-r! Any place but here I told the others. Aided in our tumbling panicky flight by the lightning flashes we finally struck a rutted wood-lot road. And then when the darkness of the storm gave place to the natural darkness of nightfall we came to a clearing, entirely surrounded by trees, in the center of which was a large log house. Lights gleamed from the front windows, thus disclosing a curiously carved wooden shaft at the top of which, facing the house, was an odd old man dressed up in a stovepipe hat.

With luck like this on our side, the leader said tensely, we undoubtedly could save Red yet. So at his orders we separated, for safety, and crept

up on the house from different angles. And then, I think, is when I was the scaredest of all. Being alone, I mean. But I didn't falter. For my chum was in probable danger.

Then as I crouched there in the darkness close to the kitchen porch—and this is the part that makes me furious—who should open the back door but Red Meyers himself. Whistling as merrily as you please. And before I could stop him he doused me with a panful of dish water.

"Well, I'll be jiggered," he let out his neck kind of amazed-like, when I staggered up the steps, the ogre's dish rag stuck in one ear and a bar of soap in the other. "Where in Sam Hill did you come from?"

"Thank heaven," says I, sort of collapsing.

"Of course," says he, looking at me kind of patient-like. "But what's it all about?"

The poor kid. Seemingly he didn't comprehend yet how narrowly he had escaped the iron jaws of the ogre's meat chopper.

"I'm thankful," I told him fervently, "that I've found you alive."

"Don't be silly," says he. And then in that big way of his he invited me to come inside and look around. "Some joint," says he. "I'm thinking of buying it."

"I give up," I told him weakly. "You're too much for me."

CHAPTER XXI

THE TITTERING TOTEM

Poppy and Rory were around in front squinting at the big totem pole, eerie object that it was in the crowding darkness, as I had seen for myself, and a fitting companion for the spooky-looking den over which it stood guard.

But they quickly put the unusual totem pole out of their minds when the abducted one unhinged the lid of his melodious gab-box on the back porch. Wonders of wonders! Nor could they cover the intervening ground fast enough so eager were they to congratulate the hero on his fortunate escape.

But it turned out that the "hero" was a big fake. He hadn't been abducted at all.

"Haw! haw! haw!" he bellowed, in that crazy way of his. "And you guys really thought I was in danger, huh? That's funny."

Funny! I thought of the agony that we had suffered in the stifling forest—the briers and the mud holes and the bumblebee that crawled up the leg of Rory's pants.

"Listen, kid," I flew at him, mad enough to pound the gizzard out of him. "This is where

you and I quit. Do you get me? I'm through with you for life."

"Aw, Jerry," he began to beg. "Don't get sore. I didn't intend to throw the dish water on you. Honest, I didn't."

"Just look at me," I then turned miserably to Poppy who, I noticed, had been doing a lot of thinking but very little talking. "And smell of me, too."

But the leader couldn't see the tragic side of it like me.

"Don't let a panful of dish water separate a lifelong companionship, Jerry," was his grinning advice.

"Well, I certainly wouldn't lose much," I further glared at the hated offender, "if I lost his companionship."

"Ditto," a corresponding glare was then shoved back at me.

"Was it really dish water, Red?" Poppy inquired curiously, plainly puzzled.

"Sure thing."

"But what were *you* doing with it?"

"Throwing it out, of course. Didn't Jerry just tell you?"

"Red," the leader added, after a brief pause, "you're a big puzzle to me. In the first place if you wanted to come over here why didn't you bring Rory along?"

"Oh, I got the idea all of a sudden."

"After he started to lay a bean trail of his own, huh?"

"Sure thing," the freckled one grinned, thinking, I guess, that he had done something smart.

"And did you really believe that he'd find your trail on the main shore?"

"Why not? He's had plenty of practice. I never dreamed, though, that you guys would horn in. What's the big idea, anyway? Did old Fuzzer chase you up the river?"

"If you must know the truth," says Poppy very seriously, "we came up here to capture a killer."

Consider our amazement then to learn that the dish washer had crawled through a cellar window finding, as he had suspected, that the house was temporarily untenanted. Both the Indian and the killer were away from home.

"You certainly had your nerve," I fired at him.

"Tra-la-la-la-la," says he, in that smart way of his. "It takes nerve to get along in this world, kid. Anyway, the house belongs to Rory's relative. So I can easily explain things to him when he comes home."

"You'll wait a long time," says Poppy soberly, "before he comes home."

"What do you mean?"

"He's been dead for seven years."

"Sweet Paris green," squawked the house breaker, with a sick look. "And I might have bumped into his ghost."

"Worse than that," I told him kind of malicious-like, "you might have bumped into the killer himself."

"Who do you mean?—the Indian?"

"No. The other guy who's wearing the scientist's dead shoes."

"Whoever heard of dead shoes?" he jeered.

"Well, then," I corrected myself, "the dead scientist's shoes, if that suits you any better."

"Jerry, it's a real treat to have you around. You're the life of the party."

"Aw, shut up," I told him. "You make me sick."

"And to think," he raved on, "that I had planned on having a long interesting talk with the scientist figuring, of course, that when he found out who I was he'd gladly let us have it."

"What?" I bit off.

"The totem pole, of course. What'd you think I came over here to borrow?—a biscuit recipe?"

Poppy began to see daylight.

"And was this dish-washing job of yours a stunt to get on the good side of the old man?"

"Partly. But, of course, I dirtied some of the dishes myself getting supper."

"Getting supper?" I echoed, further staring at him.

"Yes, *getting supper,*" he fired back. "Just because I was here alone do you suppose I wanted to starve to death?"

"Well," I kind of sighed, figuring that it was a hopeless case, "Professor Quills never'll know what he missed. But bu-lieve me, kid, it's a mighty lucky thing for you, as I mentioned, that you didn't bump into the killer himself."

"Huh!" the other strutted. "As though any killer could scare me. Hard-boiled Boliver. That's me, kid. When I hits 'em," he puffed out his chest, "they lay. And any time you want to feast your eyes on a clever little assortment of marble doo-dads just whistle and I'll tote you up the hill to my private cemetery."

"What shall we do with him?" I turned helplessly to the leader.

"Why not leave him alone?" the other grinned. "Maybe he'll outgrow it."

The forest, as it surrounded us on all sides, an impenetrable black wall, was peculiarly uneasy. And I wondered at this until I caught the rumble of distant thunder. Another storm was brewing. And the trees seemingly were afraid.

The thought of staying here all night chilled my backbone. But with another storm sweeping down on us what else could we do? Certainly,

we'd be helpless in the black forest even if that geezer with the goat's whiskers didn't run us down. And, to that point, I wondered if Rory really had seen a face peeking at us through the bushes. Was it the piper himself?

We then went inside and locked the kitchen door. And at the others' suggestion I stripped and wrung out my clothes. Yet all the time I was doing this I had the combined uneasy and embarrassed feeling that we were being watched. Were there hidden eyes in the walls? And was the owner of these eyes waiting for a favorable chance to reach out and grab us? Br-r-r-r! Beautiful thoughts, surely.

This kind of a house was new stuff to me. Built of rough logs on the outside the inside was finished as slick as a button. Swell hardwood floors covered with Indian rugs that must have cost a fortune and huge ceiling beams of solid oak. There was a fireplace, too, even bigger than the one in the scientist's other home at the lake. But no corresponding sliding panels! At least we could find none. Yet more persistently than ever did the feeling attach itself to me that hidden hostile eyes followed every movement that we made.

As evidence of the scientist's earlier work the walls were decorated with odd Indian trophies. Painted wooden masks and queer-shaped wooden

hats. But we saw no wooden shoes hoof-shaped or otherwise.

"And this," bellowed Red, copy-catting after Poppy in the "Freckled Goldfish" book, "is the Grand Library of resplendent historical assassinations, for it was here that Harold Lloyd and Charley Chaplin signed the Declaration of Insignificance. Notice the marvelous wooden book cases. Solid walnut from Walnut County, Illinois. And here, just without our Queen Elizabeth window, we have the only real, honest-to-goodness, genuine totem pole in captivity."

"Bring a hand lamp," says Poppy quickly. "I want to get a better look at it."

"Yes," says I kind of shivery-like, "and all the time you're peeking through the window something out there is peeking back at you."

"Who do you mean?" he grinned. "The goat-man?"

"Look up the pole," I pointed to old high-hat. "He *is* watching us, Jerry."

"Come on. Let's get away from here."

"A queer place to plant a totem pole," says the other thoughtfully. "And peculiarly, too, it faces the house."

"The better to watch us," I put in.

The big clock in the living room as it steadily ticked off the minutes was proof to us that the owner, to so speak of him, wasn't far away. For

clocks don't wind themselves. And I found myself listening for the click of a door key or the creak of a sliding panel. But nothing happened. The only sounds that we heard in the house, outside of the clock, were the sounds that we made ourselves. Nor did anything spring at us or come in on us openly.

"But let's keep together," I told the leader, kind of trembling-like. "For I have the shaky feeling that something is bound to happen."

And something did happen.

The storm was on us now in all its fury. Yet, above the shriek of the rain-drenched wind as it beat against the windows we could hear again that weird tittering voice. Was it the Indian? Was he standing outside in the storm? Or was he hidden in the walls?

Poppy ran to the library. Then, beckoning to me, he sprang up the stairs.

"What is it?" I inquired breathlessly, joining him in the room directly over the library.

"Listen," he breathed, clutching my arm.

Plainer than ever was the tittering now. And we saw in a flash that it came from the totem pole, directly outside the window. It was the old man in the high hat! He was watching us. And conscious of our complete helplessness he was tittering to himself in evil, gloating satisfaction.

As I say, the storm was lashing the log house and the surrounding forest like a million demons. Yet over and over again, between thunder claps, we heard the continued cold-blooded tittering of the smug-eyed old man on the totem pole. Oh, it sounds crazy, I know. You're saying to yourself right now that our imaginations tricked us. But what if I tell you that he actually leered at us as we pressed our faces to the upper window? *Weird?* I'll tell the world it was weird. And old swagger-heels who earlier had bragged so chestily about his "private cemetery" was so scared that he couldn't even gurgle.

"It's a hurricane," cried Poppy, as the wind attacked the log house with added fury. A bedlam of screams and moans came from the forest as the suffering trees were painfully stripped of their wooden limbs. Then, uprooted by the gale, the totem pole itself was thrown through the big library window. And on the heels of the accompanying terrific crash the wind swept through the house snuffing out the kerosene lamps. And then, with no light to protect us—caught there in the inky blackness—the tittering voice sort of closed in on us. One minute it was in front of us; the next minute it was behind us.

"I've got it," Poppy's screaming voice suddenly cut the darkness. "It's a bird, fellows. A parrot. So don't be scared."

CHAPTER XXII

LATER FINDINGS

THE story that we carried back to Tutter the following morning filled Rory's people with pained amazement. Summoning other relatives by telegraph they hastened into the forest. And there, as we had told them, was the curious effigy of the dead scientist as the wind had upset it into the library. There, too, on its perch beside the fireplace was the mysterious tittering parrot.

"Danawaq!" it screeched, in a shrill human-like voice. "Danawaq! Tee-hee-hee-hee-hee!"

And "Danawaq," we learned later on, was the compound Tlingit word for "Silver Eyes," which was the tribal name of the Indian, not a man as we had supposed but, strangely, a woman dressed up in men's clothes—in reality the dead scientist's unacknowledged wife.

So you can see now why he had hidden her in the woods. Losing interest in his scientific work and wanting to live in idleness and luxury, the big ambition of his life, he had secretly married her for her money following his discovery of the ore vein on her father's land. Nor was he

man enough to acknowledge her to his relatives.

At first he had planned on keeping her in the castle that he built at Walkers Lake. Which explains the true purpose of the hidden rooms. But this was so much like making a prisoner of her that his conscience smote him, I guess. Anyway, he then provided a separate home for her in the adjacent forest.

It is doubtful if he cared a snap of his fingers for her except as she served his ends. For men who love their wives don't keep them hidden. Yet he was good to her in a way. And she in turn, loving him devotedly, was content to do as he said, giving him complete charge of her vast fortune and never questioning how he spent his days. The hours that were uppermost in her mind were the hours that he spent with her.

And so the scientist realized the great ambition of his life. As Peter Gnome his lavish expenditures, as he heaped the money into his new estate, were the talk of the countryside. Was he Midas himself? It would almost seem so. The great castle took shape. And thousands upon thousands of dollars were spent improving the lake shore. Nature's jungle became a paradise. Servants came on the heels of the workmen. And then queer stories got into circulation, following which, as we know, the central object

of these whispered stories was found dead in the forest.

And so far as I know to the contrary he actually was killed by a horse, however much we had been led away from that commonplace theory. The mount that he used in his secret travel between the two places was kept in one of the hidden tunnels opening into the forest. And if you were to go there with me I could show you a pile of bones. So it's my conclusion that the horse reared in the storm, as would be perfectly natural, upsetting the driver, after which he met his end. Then the horse ran back to its hidden stable there to die of neglect. For the hands that had fed it were no more.

Later, as we know, the grieving wife, now left alone except for her parrot, carved the queer totem pole of which, like the later pocket piece, also her work, the chief figure was the effigy of the departed husband, the lower crests being those of her own family.

The millionaire, of course (enjoying wide freedom under his assumed name and in no danger of detection by his relatives), knew that he was being spied upon, which explains why he told the snoopy gardener the story of the goat-man. Mr. Ringer (meaning Rory's pa) showed me a book taken from the scientist's library in which there

was a similar story. And I'll always wonder if the millionaire didn't partly believe this story. Maybe that was one reason why he wanted to be rich—so that he could devote all of his time to studying nature. And what a queer coincidence that he should have been struck down by something that left a telltale hoof print on his chest. It would seem almost like the working of Fate—his pay, as you might say, for cheating his wife of her rights.

Silver Eyes, of course, to speak of her by that name, knew about the secret rooms in her husband's castle. And probably her grief took her there time and time again. Certainly, it is known that she roamed for days in the forest playing her lute (which was the music that we heard in the storm), only returning to her lonely home when driven there by fatigue and hunger. A sad life. And the shame is that the combined greed and false pride of an educated American caused it. Loneliness like that will break down the strongest of minds. And her's was no exception, though Rory's people say little on that point. But it was from her that the parrot picked up its weird tittering. So you can use your own judgment remembering, too, about those daggery eyes which proved her fear of people. To-day she is well taken care of in a sanitarium. But I doubt if she'll ever return to the log house in

the forest now utilized by Rory's people as a sort of summer home. Invited there time and again I always make excuses to Rory. For I don't like the place. It's too full of spooky memories, I guess. Nor do I ever look at the big totem pole, as it was later brought to town, without a queer feeling.

One time I asked Mr. Ringer why the Indian woman, dressed up in men's clothes, had broken into Poppy's work shop. She always wore men's clothes, he told me. Her husband had told her to do that the better to escape notice. And the day I surprised her (which partly explains her startled wild look) she was searching for her escaped parrot, having seen it fly into a hole under the eaves after following it for hours. It was the parrot that we heard that night in the driveway, the owner having again picked up its trail. Later the bird got into the hidden rooms through a ventilator, and it was there that it was captured under circumstances already described. Shut in a closet while its owner wandered aimlessly through the adjacent forest like a lost soul, seemingly unafraid of the terrific storm as it had beaten down upon her, the parrot had been released when the rushing wind unlatched the closet door. Red Meyers likes to let on that he knew all the time that the titterer was a parrot. But I've told you the truth about myself. Carried

away by my imagination, as I listened to the tittering, I actually shared Poppy's belief that it was the totem-pole geezer himself. Why the wealthy owner of Gnome Towers named his boat *The Tittering Totem* I don't know. It's Poppy's opinion, though (to use his big words), that the word "tittering" was put in for alliterative purposes.

And that's that.

The same morning that we came back to town with our amazing story a rescue party, headed by old Mr. Ott, hastened up the river to Goose Island. And not only did they bring old Patsy back to town safe and sound, but that night the Zulutown people turned out en masse, as the saying is, to welcome him home. Mrs. Matilda Wiggins came with her fifty-cent antique painting which was put back in its accustomed place on the wall from which old Fuzzer had heartlessly yanked it in preparation for his auction. Other neighbors brought odd dishes and various articles that they had bought at the sale, only too glad of the chance to return the cherished belongings to their original owner. The larger articles that hadn't been sold were put back in place. And when old Patsy stepped into the house it looked just as homelike as ever. There were tears in the old inventor's eyes as his happy

neighbors flocked around him, laughing and talking. But before I tell you about the party and how Red, the big pig, ate a whole jar of dill pickles, I want to sort of dispose of the Fuzzers.

Poppy had disappeared shortly after our return to town. But he was on hand when I woke up at two o'clock, Mother having insisted that I lie down and take a nap. Rather wonderingly I followed the leader down town where, to my amazement, he climbed the outside stairs to Lawyer Fuzzer's rented office over the meat market, which rather shabby building I now recalled had been picked up by Mr. Ott for a few thousand dollars.

"He sent for us, Jerry," was the short explanation given to me as the unafraid leader opened the screen door.

And there sat old fatty at his desk waiting for us.

"Um . . ." says he, out of the depths of his big stomach. "Sit down."

Which we did.

"I'm glad," he then went on, hating us, of course, but trying not to show it, "that you had the good sense to come here as I requested. For I have a proposition to make to you."

"Yes," says Poppy.

Seated near the door, the better to run in case

the bigger one tried any funny work, I heard a commotion as old Mr. Ott appeared in the street with a smoking tar melter.

"Fire 'er up, b'ys," says he to his helpers. "Give 'er lots of wood. Fur you kain't spread tar unless you git it nice an' hot. An' while you're gittin' the tar ready I'll run back to my office an' git them feather pillows I told you about."

Tar and feathers! Geeminy crickets! And my own dad was there, too, as was Red's dad and a dozen other prominent business men.

Poppy's eyes followed mine. And I saw a peculiar grin spread over his face. Then he gave strict attention to what the unsuspecting lawyer was saying.

"You have a piece of property that I need. And while I probably could go to law and force you to relinquish it I prefer to arrive at a quicker and more amicable adjustment of our—ah—misunderstanding."

"There's no misunderstanding," says Poppy. "I know what your crooked game is; and you know where I stand."

Which was a hard pill for the lawyer to swallow, as his burning face proved. But he finally choked it down.

"I've reached an age," says he, in a quiet

voice, "where I can control my temper—especially when matters of importance to me are at stake. . . . What's your price?"

"What do you mean?"

"I want that carburetor. And I'm willing to pay for it. So name your price."

"Is this a bribe?"

"Call it that if you wish. As a matter of fact I realize that I've done wrong. I shouldn't have tried to sidestep my obligations to the old inventor. And I'm willing to do the right thing by him. But you in turn, if I may say so, have considerable to learn about business. It isn't a game of charity. The thing to do is to get all you can. The fellow who grabs first and has the biggest hands gets the most."

"And that's your idea of business?"

"Yes," the speaker nodded, "and it'll be your idea, too, when you develop the sense of a man."

"No," says Poppy, "you're wrong. My idea of business is to make it helpful to everybody concerned. And I'll never change my idea."

"Well, we won't argue that. Again I ask you —what's your price? I'd rather pay you what you ask and get rid of you."

"Mr. Fuzzer," Poppy flushed, "I wish I was big enough to sock you. For that's a blamed dirty insult."

"Don't get dramatic. This is a business proposition. Will a thousand dollars satisfy you?"

Poppy got his temper in hand.

"And where does old Patsy come in?" he inquired quietly.

"Oh, I'll take care of him. I'll make a rich man of him. Just sign this paper, waiving all interests in the carburetor, and I'll make out your check."

Here young smarty bounded up the stairs.

"Hey, Pa! There's a whole gang of men down there in front getting ready to tar and feather you. Hear 'em?"

Sort of stunned at first, the lawyer got quickly to his feet and ran to the door.

"Thar he is," cried Mr. Ott. "Thar's the ol' skunk now who tried to steal the washin' machine an' shove its inventor into the poorhouse. So git the tar ready, b'ys. Watch out, though, you don't burn yourselves. Yep, I've got the feathers. Come on."

Fuzzer realized, of course, what a dirty skunk he was. And he saw that he had come to the end of his rope. The indignant business men, as gotten together by Mr. Ott, were all against him. More than that they were going to tar and feather him.

Wedging himself through a back window I

saw him slide down the iron steps of a fire escape. Then he and his son jumped into their automobile and drove furiously out of town. Which, I might add, was the last that we ever saw of them. Instead of "retiring" all he had come to Tutter for was to skin somebody, it being his notion that small-town people are suckers. Later his property changed hands. And to-day, I dare say, he's anchored in some other small town the natives of which are dazzled by his great wealth. *Rich?* Say, he owed everybody in town. So you can see how rich he was, another reason, I might add, why he never came back.

The business men, of course, had seen the big green automobile disappear down the street in a cloud of dust. And how they did laugh.

"Now," says Mr. Ott, with twinkling eyes, "git the ladders, b'ys, an' carry the tar up to the roof. See that you spread it nice an' even, too."

Isn't he a funny old man?

Poppy then told me the truth about the supposed "sheriff."

"He's a manufacturer of outboard motors, Jerry. But I never suspected that he was the man I had written to when he tackled us on the pier. I had a long talk with him at the hotel. Mr. Davidson and Art were there, too. And big things are in the wind. Not only a washing-

machine factory. But the carburetor is going to be manufactured as a separate specialty. Old Patsy's going to be rich."

So it's easy to understand the happiness of the Zulutown people that night. Red and I were there, as I say. And will I ever forget how those old cods danced when some one struck up a lively tune on a fiddle. Mrs. Wiggins kicked so high she ripped her green silk petticoat. But what of that? Celebrations like this don't occur more than once in a lifetime. Then old Cap'n Tinkertop got busy. Around and around he spun on his peg-leg, clapping his hands in time with the music and singing the familiar "Turkey-in-the-straw" tune at the top of his voice. After he collapsed old Mr. Krebby (the man with the ear trumpet) got up to show what he could do. And did the merrymakers ever shout when they caught sight of the old man's rear end. For the seat of his Sunday pants was plastered with whipped cream. And there in the chair that he had vacated was the wreckage of a once beautiful party cake.

"Oh," Red groaned in my ear. "What a waste."

The old boatman was there, too. As chipper as you please now that he knew the truth about the goat-man. And he's still as snoopy as ever. That's the way he finds out things—by listening

under people's windows. Some day, as I tell him, his ears are going to get him into trouble.

Art, of course, bought the new boat. But though Mr. Hoenoddle didn't sell us *that* boat we are going to buy its mate, old Patsy paying the bill. He wants to do that for us, he says. And I think it's all right. Later, under Art's leadership, we spent a spooky hour digging up the wooden corpse. Br-r-r-r! I'll miss that kid when he goes back to Milwaukee. But it's his promise to visit us at Christmas. For he likes us as well as we like him. The right kind of a rich boy, I think.

And that's all. But keep your giggling machine oiled up. For soon you'll meet the same old gang in what may prove to be the funniest book of all—POPPY OTT AND THE PRANCING PANCAKE.

Yah, Poppy sort of dipped into buckwheat pancake flour this trip. And what wonderful buckwheat flour it was, with its supposed hair-growing properties, and a boon to bald heads. The fun started the day he opened up his new pancake business under that striking name. The Prancing Pancake! Everybody who saw the sign laughed.

So, unless you, too, want to laugh don't touch this coming new book. I warn you.

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